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ON THE SHORTNESS OF LIFE

论生命之短暂

[古罗马] 塞内加

[英汉双语]

LIFE IS LONG IF YOU KNOW HOW

中国出版集团
中国对外翻译出版公司

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企鹅口袋书·伟大的思想

论生命之短暂

（英汉双语）

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观　念

——《伟大的思想》代序

梁文道

每隔一段时间，媒体就喜欢评选一次“影响世界的X个人”或者“改变历史的X项发明”。然而，在我看来，几乎所有人类史上最重大的变革，首先都是一种观念的变革。

我们今天之所以会关注气候的暖化与生物多样性的保存，是因为我们看待地球的方式变了，我们比以前更加意识到人在自然中的位置，也更加了解自然其实是一个动态的系统。放弃了人类可以主宰地球的世界观，这就意味着我们接受了一个观念的变化。同样地，我们不再相信男人一出生就该主宰女人，甚至也不再认为男女之别是不可动摇的本质区分；这也是观念的变化。如果说环保运动和女权运动有任何影响的话，那些影响一定就是从大脑开始的。也不要只看好事，二十世纪最惨绝人寰的浩劫最初也只不过是一些小小的观念，危险的观念。比如说一位德国人，他相信人类的进化必以“次等种族”的灭绝为代价……

这套丛书不叫“伟大的巨著”，是因为它们体积都不大，而且还有不少是抽取自某些名著的章节。

可它们却全是伟大的观念，例如达尔文论天择，潘恩论常识，它们共同构成了人类的观念地图。从头看它一遍，就是检视文明所走过的道路，从深处理解我们今天变成这个样子的原因。

也许你会发现其中有些陌生的名字，或者看起来没有那么“伟大”的篇章（譬如普鲁斯特追忆他的阅读时光），但你千万不要小看它们。因为真正重要，真正能够产生启蒙效果的观念往往具有跨界移动的能力，它会跨越时空，离开它原属的领域，在另一个世界产生意外的效果。就像马可·波罗在监狱里述说的异国图景，当时有谁料得到那些荒诞的故事会诱发出哥伦布的旅程呢？我也无法猜测，这套小书的读者里头会不会有下一个哥伦布，他将带着令人惊奇的观念航向自己的大海。

《伟大的思想》中文版序

企鹅《伟大的思想》丛书2004年开始出版。在英国，已付印80种，尚有20种计划出版。美国出版的丛书规模略小，德国的同类丛书规模更小一些。丛书销量已远远超过200万册，在全球很多人中间，尤其是学生当中，普及了哲学和政治学。中文版《伟大的思想》丛书的推出，迈出了新的一步，令人欢欣鼓舞。

推出这套丛书的目的是让读者再次与一些伟大的非小说类经典著作面对面地交流。太长时间以来，确定版本依据这样一个假设——读者在教室里学习这些著作，因此需要导读、详尽的注释、参考书目等。此类版本无疑非常有用，但我想，如果能够重建托马斯·潘恩《常识》或约翰·罗斯金《艺术与人生》初版时的环境，重新营造更具亲和力的氛围，那也是一件有意思的事。当时，读者除了原作者及其自身的理性思考外没有其他参照。

这样做有一定的缺点：每个作者的话难免有难解或不可解之处，一些重要的背景知识会缺失。例如，读者对亨利·梭罗创作时的情况毫无头绪，也不了解该书的接受情况及影响。不过，这样做的优点也很明显。最突出的优点是，作者的初衷又一次变得重要起来——托马斯·潘恩的愤怒、查尔斯·

达尔文的灵光、塞内加的隐逸。这些作家在那么多国家影响了那么多人的生活，其影响不可估量，有的长达几个世纪，读他们书的乐趣罕有匹敌。没有亚当·斯密或阿图尔·叔本华，难以想象我们今天的世界。这些小书的创作年代已很久远，但其中的话已彻底改变了我们的政治学、经济学、智力生活、社会规划和宗教信仰。

《伟大的思想》丛书一直求新求变。地区不同，收录的作家也不同。在中国或美国，一些作家更受欢迎。英国《伟大的思想》收录的一些作家在其他地方则默默无闻。称其为“伟大的思想”，我们亦慎之又慎。思想之伟大，在于其影响之深远，而不意味着这些思想是“好”的，实际上一些书可列入“坏”思想之列。丛书中很多作家受到同一丛书其他作家的很大影响，例如，马塞尔·普鲁斯特承认受约翰·罗斯金影响很大，米歇尔·德·蒙田也承认深受塞内加影响，但其他作家彼此憎恨，如果发现他们被收入同一丛书，一定会气愤难平。不过，读者可自行决定这些思想是否合理。我们衷心希望，您能在阅读这些杰作中得到乐趣。

《伟大的思想》出版者

西蒙·温德尔

Introduction to the Chinese Editions of Great Ideas

Penguin's Great Ideas series began publication in 2004. In the UK we now have 80 copies in print with plans to publish a further 20. A somewhat smaller list is published in the USA and a related, even smaller series in Germany. The books have sold now well over two million copies and have popularized philosophy and politics for many people around the world – particularly students. The launch of a Chinese Great Ideas series is an extremely exciting new development.

The intention behind the series was to allow readers to be once more face to face with some of the great non-fiction classics. For too long the editions of these books were created on the assumption that you were studying them in the classroom and that the student needed an introduction, extensive notes, a bibliography and so on. While this sort of edition is of course extremely useful, I thought it would be interesting to recreate a more intimate feeling – to recreate the atmosphere in which, for example, Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* or John Ruskin's *On Art and Life* was first published – where the reader has no other guide than the original author and his or her own common sense.

This method has its severe disadvantages – there will inevitably be statements made by each author which are either hard or impossible to understand, some important context might be missing. For example the reader has no clue as to the conditions under which Henry Thoreau was writing his book and the reader cannot be aware of the book's reception or influence. The advantages however

are very clear – most importantly the original intentions of the author become once more important. The sense of anger in Thomas Paine, of intellectual excitement in Charles Darwin, of resignation in Seneca – few things can be more thrilling than to read writers who have had such immeasurable influence on so many lives, sometimes for centuries, in many different countries. Our world would not make sense without Adam Smith or Arthur Schopenhauer – our politics, economics, intellectual lives, social planning, religious beliefs have all been fundamentally changed by the words in these little books, first written down long ago.

The Great Ideas series continues to change and evolve. In different parts of the world different writers would be included. In China or in the United States there are some writers who are liked much more than others. In the UK there are writers in the Great Ideas series who are ignored elsewhere. We have also been very careful to call the series Great Ideas – these ideas are great because they have been so enormously influential, but this does not mean that they are Good Ideas – indeed some of the books would probably qualify as Bad Ideas. Many of the writers in the series have been massively influenced by others in the series – for example Marcel Proust owned so much to John Ruskin, Michel de Montaigne to Seneca. But others hated each other and would be distressed to find themselves together in the same series! But readers can decide the validity of these ideas for themselves. We very much hope that you enjoy these remarkable books.

Simon Winder
Publisher
Great Ideas

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论生命之短暂

保利努斯①啊，大多数人都抱怨自然之吝啬，因为人生短暂，而这被赋予的短暂人生竟又是如此瞬间即逝，以至于除极少数人之外，其余的人都还没来得及开始生活便寿数已尽。并非只有平庸之辈和疏于思考的大众苍生才对这种人们所说的世间通病发出哀叹，那些声名显赫的人物也会因同样感觉而抱怨，因此也才有了最伟大的医学之父的至理名言："人生苦短，艺术恒久。"②连亚里士多德也会因此而大发牢骚，那是与其智者身份极不相宜的。他指责自然如此偏宠动物，竟然让它们活出五个、十个生命周期，却把人的生命限制在极其短暂的时间里，尽管他为那么众多、伟大的成就而生。生命并非短促，而是我们荒废太多。一生足够漫长，如能悉心投入，足以创造丰功伟绩。然而，在漫不经心、挥霍无度，汲汲于无聊琐事，最终到达万劫不复的终极之时，我们才会幡然醒悟。浑然不觉中，时光荏苒，生命已经逝去。因而，实际赋予我们的生命原非短暂，是我们自己使然；上天所赐不薄，是我们将其荒废虚掷。这正如败家之子将到手的万贯家财，一掷千金，顷刻散尽。若托付给经营有方者管理，即便这财富不多也可提升使用价值。所以，倘能妥善安排，我们的生命便可延长。

我们为何要埋怨自然母亲？她已经仁至义尽：生命，如能善用，便足可长寿。然而，有人贪得无厌，欲壑难填；有人碌

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① 保里努斯：塞内加的朋友，是主管罗马粮食供养的官员。

② 这是医药之父希波克拉底的名言。

碌无为，不务正业；有人醉生梦死，有人慵懒怠惰。有人因政治野心而总是仰人鼻息，结果心力交瘁；有人经商发财，惟利是图，得陇望蜀；有人热衷穷兵黩武，总是损害他人，或总惴惴不安，唯恐大祸临头，因而备受煎熬；有些人殚精竭虑，心甘情愿鞍前马后侍奉大人物而费力不讨好；很多人或觊觎他人的财富，或抱怨自己的贫穷，无暇他顾；不少人没有追求，随波逐流，反复无常，永不满足。有些人一生了无目标，而就在他们无精打采哈欠连天时，死神已神不知鬼不觉地降临——至此，我毫不怀疑那位最伟大诗人的经典名句所言极是："我们真正活过的那段生命仅仅是一小部分。"①的确如此，其余的部分不能算是生命，仅仅是时间而已。恶习裹挟着人们，从四面八方发起进攻，使人们不得再起身睁眼去识辨真相，只能俯首就擒，任欲火中烧而不能自拔，永远失去自我。即使侥幸得到一丝安宁，依然辗转反侧，终难摆脱邪念的缠磨回归平静，就像深海的水即使在风暴肆虐过后仍然翻腾不息。你觉得我说的都是公认的邪恶之徒？看看那些被众人追捧的幸运儿吧，祝福的甜言蜜语令其窒息。多少人为财富所累！多少人高谈阔论，终日为展示自己的天赋才华而呕心沥血！多少人沉溺于无度的享乐而憔悴枯槁！又有多少人囿于门客的包围之中而身不由己！总而言之，纵观这些人，从平民百姓到达官显贵——这位请求法律援助，那位提供帮助；这位接受审判，那位为其辩护，而另一位做出判决；无人为自己提出要求，每个人都在为他人耗散精力。问到那些知名人士你就会发现他们都有着这样的显著特征：甲想讨好乙，乙想讨好丙，没有人为自己操心。于是又有某些人无名火起——他们抱怨上司目中无人，因为当他们希望有人倾听时，上司却忙得无暇旁顾。不过如果一个人

① 这句诗的作者姓名不详。

自己总是自顾不暇的时候，又怎敢抱怨他人傲气十足呢？然而，无论你是何许人，大人物有时还会将目光投向你，即便表情盛气凌人，他仍会洗耳恭听你的见解，准许你与他比肩而行。可是你却对自己从来都不屑一顾，不屑聆听自己的心声。由于你已经表明并非因为你指望别人的陪伴，而是不能容忍自己做自己的陪伴，所以，你没有理由认为别人就该关注你。

即便先哲都来对此话题予以考量，对于人类头脑的浑浑噩噩他们也会惊奇不已。人们不会让别人获取自己的地产，一点儿小小的地界纠纷，都会使他们即刻抄起石头拿起武器大动干戈；然而他们却能任由别人侵占他们的生命——咳，他们甚至自己请人来掌控他们的生命。你会发现没人会愿意别人分享自己的钱财，但是我们每个人瓜分了自己的生命！人们在捍卫个人财产时锱铢必较，而一旦挥霍起本该吝惜的时间，却是出手大方。所以我要拉住一位先辈对他说：“我看您老高寿，已近百岁之年，或超过百岁，来，给我们盘点一下您这一辈子吧。算算你用了多少时间与债主周旋，多少时间与情妇厮混，多少时间与贵族结交，多少时间与门客敷衍，多少时间和老婆吵架，多少时间惩治奴仆，多少时间在为履行社会义务在城里奔忙，还得算上生病后用去的时间，再加上无所事事流逝的时间，你会发现属于你的时间比你原来估计的要少多了。回想一下什么时候有过固定的目标，按自己计划过的日子才几天；什么时间随心所欲地干事，什么时候表情自然，什么时候心无旁骛，如此漫长的一生取得了哪些成就；不知不觉中多少人侵扰过你的生活；无缘由的悲痛、愚蠢的嬉笑、贪得无厌、外界的诱惑使你失去了多少人生的大好时光，自己却所剩无几，你会感到自己死得太早了。

为什么会这样呢？你活着就好像命中注定会长生不老；你从未感到自身的脆弱，你对时光流逝浑然不觉，因而挥霍

虚掷，好像时光会满载而至，源源而来——而其实你为别人或别的事情付出的那一天很可能就是你的末日。恐惧时，你知道终会一死；贪求时，你似乎长生不老。你会听到很多人这样说："等我五十岁时我就退休赋闲；等我六十岁时就推掉所有公干。"但，谁能保证你那么长寿呢？谁能确保你能按照自己设定的路线活下去呢？当你的生命只剩下残羹冷炙，当你的时间已无法用在其他事情上才开始思考，你不觉得惭愧吗？当生命即将结束才准备开始真正的生活就已经为时太晚了！忘了人终有一死，而把那些明智的计划拖延到五十、六十岁时才开始实施，想在很少有人能活到的那个岁数才开始生活，这是多么愚蠢！

你会发现很多达官显贵都曾声称他们渴望闲暇，赞赏闲暇，觉得悠闲的生活比自己的尊荣更可贵。有时他们渴望能从高位平安卸任，因为即便没有外界袭击和骚乱，好运自己也会顷刻间灰飞烟灭。

被奉若神明的奥古斯都大帝①得到诸神的恩泽比谁都多，而他却不断地祈求歇息，希望能暂停公务，休息片刻。他句句不离的话题是——对赋闲的企盼。他曾用慰藉的话宽解自己的辛劳，虽然虚假却很中听。他说，有那么一天他会为愉悦自己而生活。他在致元老院的一封信中承诺他的隐退将不会缺少尊严，也不会与先前的荣耀不合，在这之后，我在信里看到："但更要谨记的是，不能光承诺，而要付之实施。但那令人欣喜的现实依旧遥遥无期，所以我把对那美好时光的向往讲出来会高兴高兴，提前享受那种愉悦。"休闲对于他如此珍贵，在还不能真实享用时，竟

① 奥古斯都大帝：罗马帝国的开国君主屋大维，又名奥古斯都，生于公元前63年9月23日死于公元14年8月19日，统治罗马43年。当他死去时，罗马元老院决定将他列入"神"的行列，并且将8月称为"奥古斯都"月。

然先搞起精神会餐。像他这种自视一人即可主宰万物，决定百姓、社稷福祉的人物，一旦想到有朝一日能将尊贵置于一旁都会欣喜万分。然而，从亲身经历中他知道，四方仰慕的尊荣令他付出了多少汗水，又隐藏着多少不为人知的焦虑。他不得不先向自己的同胞开战，再和同僚打仗，最后向亲人宣战，造就尸山血海。他征战于马其顿、西西里、埃及、叙利亚、亚洲以及几乎所有的国家——当他的军队厌倦了血洗罗马，他又向国外敌军开火。当他平定阿尔卑斯地区，制服在他和平帝国中部崛起的敌人时，当他把疆土扩展到莱茵河、幼发拉底河和多瑙河一带，在罗马本土，穆列纳、凯皮奥、雷必达、埃格纳提乌斯等却在秣马厉兵与之抗衡。当他还未逃脱这些人的阴谋时，他的女儿①及其周围所有因与之通奸而像发过誓一样效忠于她的贵族青年，还有埃乌勒斯以及那个与安东尼联手的第二个可怕的女人，使他在风烛残年仍惊恐不安。他将这些“痈疽”和那些左膀右臂统统除掉，但马上又有新的取而代之，就像身体的血量过多总要从某个地方破口而出。所以他渴望闲暇，期盼并想象可以从烦劳中换得解脱。万民向他祈求，而他祈求的无非如此。

当马尔库斯·西塞罗②受到喀提林③、克劳狄乌斯④、庞

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① 指朱莉亚，因通奸罪被奥古斯都流放到潘达塔里亚岛。

② 马尔库斯 西塞罗（公元前106－43年）曾担任执政官、元老院元老、总督，是古罗马最有才华的思想家、政治家、哲学家、散文家、演说家之一。

③ 喀提林曾与西塞罗竞争执政官的职位，失败后纠集了一帮对西塞罗不满的人企图武力推翻政府。西塞罗得知后向元老院揭露了他的阴谋并成功地敦促元老院宣布他为公敌，继而一举粉碎了他的阴谋。

④ 克洛狄乌斯公元前58年为古罗马保民官，是西塞罗的政敌，曾提出针对西塞罗的放逐法案。

培、克劳苏等人①的排斥时——他们有的是公开的敌人，有的是可疑的朋友——当国家形势动荡风雨飘摇时，他备受煎熬，试图力挽狂澜，救国家于穷途末路之时，但最终却被风暴席卷而去。在太平盛世时他不得安宁，在灾祸临头时他无法忍受，他多少次诅咒那执政官的职位，而此前他曾不停地称颂它，当然，那也是不无道理的。当老庞培被征服，儿子仍在西班牙力图收拾他的残部时，西塞罗给阿提库斯写了一封信，信中他用了多么凄婉的字句！“你想知道我在这里干什么吗?”他写道，“我像半个囚徒似地待在自己图斯库兰的别墅。”接着他哀叹过去，抱怨现在，绝望地叹息未来。西塞罗称自己为半个囚徒，但是智者绝不至使用如此悲怆的字眼。他永远不会成为“半个囚徒”，而是享受稳定、彻底的自由，随心所欲做自己的主宰，至高无上地生活。因为什么东西能凌驾于一位超越命运之神的人之上呢?

李维乌斯·杜路苏斯②孔武有力，曾提出改革格拉古兄弟灾难性政策的法案，因而得到全意大利人的支持。但他的措施不会有成果，因为从一开始就无法贯彻，一旦实施又无法放弃。据说他曾诅咒自己一直过的动荡生活，还说他是唯一一个从未享受过假期的人，从小就没有。因为，当他尚未成年，身着青年装的他就斗胆在陪审团面前为一些被告说话，并且居然在法庭上产生了影响，结果正如大家所知，他迫使法庭做出了有利于他当事人的判决。小小年纪却有如此野心的人什么事干不出来?你就该知道如此年幼就这么胆大妄为会给公众和个人带来多大的麻烦。所以当他抱怨自己从未享

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① 西塞罗因拒绝参加庞培、克拉苏、凯撒组成的前三头联盟而得罪了他们。

② 李维乌斯·杜路苏斯是公元前91年的保民官，曾提出谷物法并倡议给予意大利人以公民权。

受过假期时已为时太晚，因为他从小就在会议广场制造大麻烦。现在还不能确定他的死是不是自己一手造成的，他是因为腹股沟突然受伤后就倒下了。有些人怀疑他是自戕，但是没有人怀疑他死得很适时。

再提这种人就有点儿多余了，他们在别人眼里是最幸福的，但他们自己对此有着清醒的认识，他们表达了对自己一生中每个的行动的憎恶。然而，抱怨归抱怨，他们既改变不了自己也改变不了别人，说完激情之辞，心情又恢复原样。

可以肯定地说，你的生命即便能延续千年，也还会缩成最短的期限：那些恶习将吞噬所有空间。你真正拥有的时间——以为可以延伸，但其实稍纵即逝的时间——也必将很快从你身边溜走：因为你没有抓住它，或将它拉回来，或试图拖延它——这个速度最快的东西，而是让它溜掉了，似乎它是某种多余的或可以替代的东西。

不过，在所有最可恶的坏人中最令人不齿的就是那些沉溺于酒色的家伙，因为这是最不可救药的沉沦。其他人即便执著于一种虚幻的荣耀，也算得上是值得称道的虚妄。你可以列出那些沉醉于不当的仇恨和战争的或贪婪或暴躁的家伙，但他们即便有罪也不失男人气概，而那些耽于声色犬马之徒却是劣迹斑斑的无耻人渣。看看这些人是如何花费时间的——他们算账花了多少时间，算计别人或担心别人被算计用了多少时间，奉承谄媚别人，别人奉承自己，支付或收取保释金，赴宴（这在现在被算作公事了）各用去多少时间，你会看到他们的这些活动，无论是好还是坏，都让他们忙得喘不上气。

最后一点，人们普遍认为，一个人如果沉迷于某种事务，就会一事无成——修辞教育或通识教育都学不好——因为精力分散了，大脑对任何东西都不能深入吸收，而会排斥一切

所谓硬塞进来的东西。对于那些沉迷于某一活动的人来说，生活是最不重要的事了，而没有比生活这门课程更难学的了。其他技艺的老师到处都能找到，实际上有些技艺连小孩子都非常精通，可以胜任教师一职。但是学会如何生活却要耗费一生的时间，而且可能会让你更惊诧的是，学会如何死也要用一生的时间。那么多精英人物都放下负担，放弃财产、放弃生意、放弃享乐，把学习如何生活作为自己余生的目标。但这些逝者生前大都坦言他们还是没有弄明白这个问题——其他人就更不明白了。相信我，伟人、圣人的标志就是从不浪费自己的时间，他的寿命之所以长久是因为他将自己所有的时间全部为己所用，没有闲置，没有荒废，没有置于别人的掌控之下。作为自己时间的监护人，他精打细算，从未发现有什么东西值得用自己的时间交换。所以他有足够的时间，而那些长时间被公事所扰的人必定自己所剩无多了。

你能想到这些人有时也会感到若有所失。确实，你会听到有些为巨大财富所累的人有时会在一群门客当中，在法院辩护时，或在做着其他体面而又痛苦的事时大喊“不能活了”。当然不能了，所有找你办事的人都让你远离了自我。被告人窃走了你多少天？那个候选人呢？那个为自己继承人送了葬之后疲惫不堪的老妪呢？还有那个装病来挑起遗产继承人贪欲的人呢？还有那个把你这样的人当朋友不是为了友谊，而是为了炫耀的颇有势力的朋友呢？我跟你说呀，把这一辈子的日子标示出来盘点一下，你会发现自己所剩极少——而且都是边角废料。某人得到了垂涎已久的职权却又想弃之不顾，反复说着：“这一年怎么还不到头呀？”另一位觉得能有机会来举办竞赛是了不起的成功①，但是一旦举办，他又说：

① 在当时古罗马公众娱乐活动的管理权归执政官。

"什么时候我才能脱身呀?"这位演讲者受到广场四面八方听众的捧场，台下挤满了听众，远处的根本听不到他的讲演，而他却说："什么时候才能休假呢?"每个人都在为生计奔忙，因渴望未来、厌倦现在而烦恼。但是将自己的时间为己所用的人，总是把每一天安排得像是最后一天的人，他们既不渴望又不惧怕明天的到来。现在每个时辰还会给他带来什么新的乐事呢?他一切都尝试过了，充分享受过了，再有其他的，命运尽可自行安排了。他现在无忧无虑，这样的一生什么都不会被拿走，而只能为其添加内容，就像一个吃饱了的人已不再需要任何食物，但是再加点儿也还能吃下。所以不要以为头发花白满脸皱纹的人就是活得长，他不是活得长，只是在世上待的时间长。如果一个人出海遇到狂风暴雨，被变幻肆虐的风吹得团团转，你可能会觉得他航行了很远，其实航行得并不远，只是浮沉动荡的时间长而已。

看到有的人想要占用别人的时间，而对方又欣然应允，我总是感到惊讶。双方都只是想到了占用时间的事由，都没有考虑到时间本身——似乎什么都没索取，什么都没付出。因为时间是无形的，无法明摆着被查看，因而被认为是很廉价的——几乎没有任何价值。这一点蒙蔽了人们，使他们忽视了这人生最宝贵的商品。人们接到养老金、抚恤金时会很高兴，为这些钱他们曾付出劳动、提供援助或者服务。但是没有人计算时间的价值——人们大肆挥霍，好像它毫无价值。但就是这些人，如果受到死亡的威胁，你就会看到他们向大夫乞求;如果他们惧怕死刑，为了保命他们会倾其所有。情绪完全不一样了呀。如果我们每个人能像计算过去岁月那样将未来的岁月当面推算出来，那些看到自己来日不多的人会是怎样震惊呀，他们将会怎样小心翼翼地利用这些时间呀!而且如果数目确定下来，无论多小的数目，也就容易安排了。

对于那不知会在什么时候戛然而止的生命我们得更慎重地存留。

但是你不要认为这些人不知道时间有多么宝贵。他们一般会对特别喜欢的人说他们会将一些岁月付出，而且他们确实在无意识中付出了。不过这礼物使他们自己有所失却而并未使别人有所得。但他们其实并不知道自己是否有所失，这样他们就能承受自己在无知中受到的损失了。岁月不能倒流，人生无法复原，生命沿着它初始的路线前行，既不会倒退也不作更改。它不会发出响动提醒你它的迅驰，而是无声无息向前溜走。它不会因帝王的指令或平民的喜好而延长。它从第一天起步，一路前行，没有停顿，没有转向。那么结果呢？当生命匆匆前行的时候，你曾沉迷不悟，这期间死亡降临，而你对此别无选择，只能接受。

还有比自吹有远见卓识的人更白痴的吗？为了改善生活，他们煞费苦心，用生命安排生命。他们把目标设定于遥远的未来。但是拖延就是对生命最大的浪费：它夺走了到来的每一天，寄望未来，而放弃现在。生活的最大障碍就是期待，期待使人心系明天而失去今日。你安排的是命运掌控的东西，却放弃了自己手中的东西。你在看什么？在为什么目标而操劳？所有的未来都是不确定的：马上开始生活。倾听我们伟大诗人的呼唤吧，他仿佛受到神谕的启示，吟唱出极富教益的诗句：

对于这里不幸的人们来说，

生命中最美好的一天总是最先消失的一天。①

他的意思是说，“你为什么闲逛？”，“你为什么无所事

① 古罗马奥古斯都时期最重要的诗人维吉尔（前70～前19）《田园诗》中的诗句。

事？你不先抓住它，它就会溜走”。而即使你抓住它，它仍会跑掉。所以你利用时间时必须使自己适应时间那瞬间即逝的速度，你必须像从一条随时可能枯竭的激流中喝水一样快速敏捷。为谴责那种无休止的拖延，诗人很委婉地用了“最美好的一天”而不是“最美好的岁月”。你贪婪也罢，但为什么要如此漠然如此怠惰拖拉（而时间正在飞逝），把今后几个月几年的时间都一溜儿排开摆在眼前？诗人讲的是当下这一天——而且是正在溜走的这一天。所以对于不幸的人——就是那些沉迷于杂务中的人——来说，最美好的一天总是最先溜掉的一天，这难道还有疑问吗？当他们心理还很幼稚时，年纪却已变老，对此他们毫不准备毫不设防，因为他们没有准备，突然间不期而遇，根本没意识到它早已一天天逼近。就像旅行者以聊天、阅读或沉思冥想打发时间，不知不觉中发现已经到达目的地。所以在人生这一疾驰不停的旅途中，无论是醒着还是睡着都是同速前行，那些沉迷于杂务的人只有到旅行结束才会有所知觉。

如果我要把这个论题分为几个小标题并提供证据，我会找出很多论据来证明：凡是沉迷于杂务的人，都会觉得生命很短促。但是，法比亚诺斯①——他绝非现在的学院派哲学家，而是那种真正的老派的哲学家——经常说我们必须对激情进行暴力攻击，而不能采取逻辑推理，必须对敌人的战线给以猛烈进攻，而不只是用针刺。恶习必须被击溃，不能只是戳戳而已。尽管如此，为了让这些人对自己的过失反省自责，必须对他们进行教育，而不能放任不管。

生命分为三个阶段：过去，现在和将来。这其中，现在是短暂的，将来是不确定的，过去是定型了的。对于过去，

① 古罗马的一位哲学家，是塞内加非常敬佩的一位老师。

命运已无力掌控，任何人也无法重新掌控。而这也正是那些沉迷于杂务者失去的东西，因为他们没有时间回首往事，即便有，回忆那些抱愧终生的事也是不愉快的，所以他们不愿意再想那些荒废的时光，如果那些恶习还清晰可现他们也没有胆量再去回想——即使那些曾被一时欢乐的魔力掩饰了阴险手段的恶行。没人愿意回到过去，除非他的所有行为都通过了良心的自我审查，这是无法自欺欺人的。那些不敢回首往事的人都是贪得无厌、妄自尊大、急功近利、见利忘义、巧取豪夺、穷奢极欲之徒。然而过去是我们时间的一部分，是神圣的、独立的，超越人类面临的一切不幸，超出命运的掌控，不为欲望、恐惧、疾病所困扰，无人能妨碍它，褫夺它，那是一种无法干预的、持久的拥有。我们是一天一天、一分钟一分钟地过眼前的日子。但是过去的日子却可以全部出现在你的脑海里。你可以任意扣留它们，审视它们——而那些沉迷杂务的人是无暇这样做的。这是一种平静的、没有任何烦扰的心境，它可以徜徉于生命的每个阶段，而那些杂务缠身者的心呢，就像套上了马轭不能回头看。所以他们的生命消失于无底深渊，如同液体倒进无底的容器，徒劳无益。所以无论给我们多少时间，如果无处安放，它还是会从心里的缝隙或漏洞中溜走。眼前的时间极其短暂，因此很多人都没意识到它的存在。因为它永远向前，步履匆匆，稍纵即逝；它曾在到来前停息，从此再无耽搁，如同天空抑或星辰，斗转星移，从未原地止步。所以杂务缠身者只关注现在，而现在的时光是如此短促，根本无法抓住，甚至在他们沉溺于各种娱乐活动时就被窃取了。

总之，你想知道他们为什么不能长寿吗？看看他们是如何渴望长生不老吧。羸弱的老翁乞求再多活几年；他们假装更年轻，并以此自慰，极力欺骗自己的同时也欺骗命运。但

是疾病会提醒他们寿数已尽，面对死亡他们是如此恐惧，似乎不是度过生命，而是被拖拽而去。他们大喊大叫说自己是傻瓜，因为他们还没有真正活过呢，倘若病痛痊愈，他们会悠闲安度余生。接着他们回想起他们巧取豪夺却无缘享受是多么的徒劳，他们的辛苦是多么的徒劳。不过对于那些远离一切杂务的人来说，生命一定是足够长了，没有挥霍，没有虚掷，没有任命运摆布，没有漫不经心地丢失，没有无度施舍而浪费，没有多余，可以说全部生命都用在了有效的投资。所以无论生命如何短暂，都是充实的，因此无论末日何时到来，理智的人都会以坚实的步伐义无反顾地迎接死神的降临。

也许你想知道我把什么人叫做“杂务缠身者”吧。你不会认为我指的是那些得靠看门犬①才能逐出法院的人吧，或那些你常见的要么被自己的支持者体面地、要么被别人的支持者轻蔑地击垮的人，或是那些为履行社会职责从自家蹿出去敲别人家大门的人，或者那些在执政官拍卖矛②下忙于钻营而终有一天使自己臭名昭著的人。有人即使赋闲也会也让自己杂务缠身：在自家的乡村房舍中，在长椅上，在独处时，甚至在一个人的时候，他们都不能好好陪陪自己。你不能说那些人的生活是悠闲的，那不过是无所事事的心不在焉。你能说那个神情焦虑却一丝不苟地摆弄科林斯铜器的人悠闲吗?几个收藏家的狂热使这些青铜价格虚涨，他们每天大部分时间都花在这些金属的斑斑锈迹上。那个坐在格斗场（我们的耻辱呀！我们还要忍受着那些不是来自罗马的恶行）急切地看着斗士们角逐的人悠闲？那个为自己成群的驮畜按年龄和

① 指每天天快黑时放进法院的看门狗，它们会向仍在工作的律师扑去，把他们赶回家。

② 指在当时被当作公共拍卖的标记插在地上的矛，这样的拍卖市场一般是拍卖战争中的缴获品或充公物品。

颜色配对的人悠闲？为竞技新秀提供生活费的人悠闲？还有，有些人在理发店花好几个小时就是为了剪掉一夜之间长出的那点儿头发，为那几根分散的较真儿，把乱了的理顺，将日渐稀疏的头发从两鬓梳过来盖在前额，理发员稍有不慎他们就会大为光火——就好像他们剪掉的是个真人！如果剪错了，或梳得不对，或没有全部束入发圈，他们就会勃然大怒，你能说他们悠闲？这些人有几个不是任由国家骚乱却不想让自己的头发凌乱，有几个不是对脑袋的潇洒比对它的安全更操心，有几个不是重整洁而轻荣誉？那些把时间都花在梳子和镜子之间的人，你能说他们悠闲？还有一些人，整天忙于作曲、听音乐、学唱歌，他们变着声发出极不自然的音调，而自然设计的最优美最纯朴的音调应该是直接发出来的；有的人总是打着响指，就好像为心里想着的曲调打着节拍子；甚至在一些严肃的，甚至是悲痛的场合你都能听见他们哼着小调。这些人的生活不是悠闲，只能说是闲散地干着事。还有，老天呀，那些宴会，我可不认为那是悠闲的时光。看他们如何紧张地摆放银器，如何认真地让侍者穿上制服，如何焦虑不安地看着厨师处理猪肉，一脸恭敬的奴仆们如何快步流星地忙来忙去，如何熟练地把家禽切成合适的块儿，那些卑微的小奴仆如何小心翼翼地为酒鬼们擦去口水。这一套玩意儿使他们慢慢获得高雅、有品味的名声，这些做法甚至延伸到私生活的所有方面，以至于现在没有这些铺张虚华，他们既不能吃也不能喝了。

还有些人我也不认为他们是悠闲的。这些人坐在轿子上被抬来抬去，总是那么准时，好像不坐就会有人不答应；另有些人，总得有人告诉他们什么时候沐浴，什么时候游泳，什么时候进餐——过度放纵麻木的头脑使他们变得萎靡不振，以至于自己都不能确定饥饱。我听说有这么一个放纵的

人——如果“放纵”可以用来形容那些摈弃了人类生活中一般习惯的人——当被人从浴室抬到轿子上时，他问，“我现在是在坐着吗?”你觉得这个连自己是不是坐着都不知道的人是否知道自己还活着，还能看，很悠闲呢?很难说，是在他真不知道的情况下我该可怜他，还是他假装不知道时我该可怜他。他们确实遗忘了很多东西，但也佯装遗忘了很多东西。他们以某些恶行为乐，以此证明自己的好运；好像知道自己在做什么，就是非常卑微低下的人。这之后看看你是否还会指责那些笑剧演员，他们创作了很多情节抨击骄奢淫逸的作风，其实他们忽略的远比已经创作的多。这么多难以置信的恶行出现在这一代，表明这个方面真是人才辈出，所以我们现在真的要责备那些忽略了它们的笑剧演员了。想一想有人如此沉溺于奢华的生活以至于得让别人来告诉他是否在坐着!所以这个人不是悠闲自在，必须得用另外的词语来描述他——有病，或者干脆说他是死人。真正悠哉游哉的人会知道自己是不是悠闲的，而这个人半死不活，需要别人告诉他自己身体的姿势——这样的人怎么能控制自己的时间呢?

——谈论那些把所有时间用在下棋或打球，或精心进行阳光浴的人是很无聊的。那些要郑重其事地从事某种活动来获得乐趣的人不是悠闲之人。譬如，毋庸置疑，那些把时间用在没有价值的文学研究的人是徒劳无益的——甚至在罗马人中也有很多人在从事这项工作。要搞清尤利西斯有多少桨手，是先有《伊里亚特》还是先有《奥德赛》，以及，它们是否是同一个作者。还有诸如此类的其他问题原本只是希腊人干的傻事。这些内容自己留用，不能增加个人的知识；用于发表，只能令人生厌而无人把你当成学者。而罗马人现在也对这些无用的知识充满了无端的热忱。最近我听到有人报道诸如哪个罗马将军率先做的这个或者那个的传闻：杜伊流

斯是赢得海战第一人，库里乌斯·丹塔图斯率先让大象引领了凯旋队列。至于这些事，即便它们还算不上建立了功勋，但至少与对国家作出卓越贡献相关。这些知识毫无用处，之所以让人们感兴趣就是因为这些毫无意义的事实的吸引力。我们还可以原谅那些调查谁是第一个说服罗马人登船的人，是克劳迪乌斯，他因此又被称为科德克斯（Caudex），因为几块木板连在一起的东西在古代被称为 Caudex 。又因此，法典叫科德克斯（Codices）①，而至今那些在台伯河上运送给养的船仍沿袭使用过去的名字科德克利阿（Codicariae）。无疑了解瓦勒里乌斯·科尔维鲁斯是第一位征服了麦萨拿的人也是颇为重要的，而且他是瓦勒里家族第一个用所征服的城市麦萨拿的名字做姓氏的人——这个姓在口口相传中被错拼成麦萨拉（Messalla）。也许你也可以容许有些人把卢西乌斯·苏拉第一个放狮子出现在竞技场的事当真吧，通常这些狮子是带着链条展示的，国王博库斯派标枪手杀死了它们。了解庞培干的那件事可能也是可以谅解的——但是有意义吗？——他是让 18 头大象在竞技场展示了与无辜之人搏斗场面的第一人。一个国家的首领，一个据称在老一辈的领导人中尤其慈善的人，竟认为这是令人难忘的以新颖方式屠戮人类的奇观。“让他们战死？不够刺激；把他们撕成碎片？不够刺激；得让硕大无比的动物把他们蹍碎。”这类事最好还是永远忘掉，免得将来被某些大权在握的人知道了，还不想让人在干这种惨无人道的事情上超越他们。啊，那繁华盛世给我们心里投下了怎样的阴霾啊。当他让这不同种类的生灵相搏斗的时候，当他在罗马人面前制造血流成河的场面，而这些罗马人随即又将被迫流血的时候，他认为自己是超越自

① 古代的法律抄本由固定在一处的木块组成。

则的，他可以将那么多可怜的人投向外来的野兽。可是后他自己呢，亚历山大人背叛了他，他最终被最卑微的奴隶死，直到那时他才明白，自己的姓氏（Great）不过是虚妄自吹。

不过，还是言归正传吧，接着谈一些人如何徒劳无益地究同一些话题。我所提到的那个人汇报说梅特卢斯在西西征服了迦太基人以后用120头大象在他的二轮战车前开道，在所有的罗马人中独一无二，而苏拉则是最后一个延长城的罗马人。一旦占领意大利（从来都不是行省）的领土，延长城界，这是一种古老的做法。了解这些比知道另一件更好吗？他曾断言阿芬丁山之所以在城界之外，或是因为民都撤到那儿，或是因为瑞摩斯神曾在那里占卜说飞禽是吉的——后来还有无数理论都是错误的或者几乎无异于谎。即便你承认他们这样说是出于虔诚，即便他们保证所说是真实的，谁的错少一些呢？谁的热情会受到限制呢，会谁更自由，更公正，更宽宏大量？法边诺斯曾说，有时他想知道，干脆什么研究都不搞是不是比总纠缠这些问题好。

在所有人中，只有那些把时间用于研究哲学的人是真正游自在的，只有他们算是活着的。因为他们不仅仔细关注己的人生，而且将所有年代收为己有，把过去所有的岁月加到他们自己的岁月里。除非我们不领情，否则应该承认有那些书写了神圣教义的伟大先哲都是为我们而生，为我指出一条人生之路。他人的艰辛工作引导我们，使我们面的事物从暗昧走向显明。没有任何年代将我们拒之门外，们可以接近所有时代；如果我们具备了崇高思想，能够跨人类弱点的狭窄界限，就可以在久远的时间大道上徜徉。们可以与苏格拉底辩论，向卡尼阿德斯质疑，与伊壁鸠鲁

共度退隐的生活，和斯多葛学派的哲学家一起克服人性弱点，与犬儒派学者共同超越人性的局限。既然自然允许我们与每一时代结交，为什么不舍弃这短暂的现时，全身心地研究过去。那是无尽的、永恒的，可与睿智的先哲共享的时光。

那些为社会职责到处奔波的人不仅扰乱自己而且侵扰他人的生活。他们要按时完成狂热的巡回，每日穿行于各家各户，不漏掉一家开启的大门，带着自私的问候走遍相隔甚远的家家户户。在如此大的城市，面对各种欲求，他们能拜见到的究竟能有几个人？有多少人因为昏昏欲睡，或正忙于自己的事，或冷漠无理而将他们拒之门外？有多少人让他们煎熬等待多时后，佯装急事在身，从他们身边匆匆而过？有多少人不走挤满门客的大厅而从隐秘的旁门逃走——好像欺骗并不比拒绝更失礼似的？有多少人头天酗了酒此时半睡半醒，慵懒迷糊，不雅地打着哈欠，还得要别人低声地、上千遍地提醒，才能连嘴唇几乎都不动地与那个为了等别人睡醒而不得不中断自己睡眠的可怜虫打招呼，叫出他的名字？

你应该这样认为：那些希望每天成为芝诺、毕达哥拉斯、德谟克利特以及其他所有人文学科的宗师们，还有亚里斯多德和色奥弗拉斯多的最亲近朋友的人，才是在履行真正有价值的职责。这些人不会因为太忙而不接见你，他们都会让到访者高兴地离去，并且变得更加专注于自身，而绝不会空手而归。他们日夜在家恭候所有人的到访。

他们没有人会强迫你去死，而是教你如何去死。这些人不会耗费你的时间，他们每个人都会将自己的岁月奉献与你。与这些人的谈话不会有任何危险，他的友谊不会危及你的生命，拜访他不需你付出高昂代价。从他们那里你想拿什么就拿什么，如果没有拿够，那不是他们的错。成为这些人的门客，是多么幸福，老年生活将会多么惬意！你将会有很多朋

友，事无巨细都可以向他们讨教，你可以每天就自己的事向他们咨询，这些朋友会告诉你真话但不会刺伤你，表扬你但不会奉承你，他们会为你提供一种仿效模式。

我们总习惯说自己无力选择父母，他们是命运偶然间配送给我们的。但是我们可以做我们愿意做的任何人的孩子。有很多高尚的才智超群的家庭，选择你希望被收养的那一家，你将不仅继承其姓氏而且还能继承其财产。这些财产不需要吝啬小气地看管，分享的人越多，它就越巨大。这些将为你提供一条永生之路，将你提升到一个任何人都不会沮丧的地方。这是延续生命——甚至永生不朽的唯一方法。荣誉、纪念碑，无论雄心勃勃的家伙们通过法令颁布什么，或在公共建筑物上竖起什么，顷刻之间都会损毁，没有任何东西是时间的流逝不能将其损毁和移除的。但是它无法损毁那些被哲学界视为神圣的作品，岁月无法消灭、减损它们。下一个、每一个随后的年代，只能使它们备受敬重，因为人们只嫉妒眼前的事物，而对遥不可及的东西却毫不掩饰赞赏之情。所以哲学家的生命可以绵延广阔，他不受他人所受的限制，只有他不受人类法则的限制，在所有的年代都被视为神明。一些过去的时光，他抓住，藏入记忆；眼下的时光，他利用；未来的时光，他预见：所有这些组合成他绵长的人生。

但是对于忘记过去、忽略现在、恐惧未来的人来说，生命是短暂的、焦灼不安的。在末日到来时，这些可怜的家伙才意识到他们一生无所事事，但为时已晚。有时他们乞求死神的到来，但是这并不能证明他们长寿。愚昧无知使他们焦躁不安而备受折磨，害怕的事情偏偏发生：他们之所以渴望死，是因为他们害怕死。他们感到度日如年，或者在预定吃饭的钟点到来前抱怨每个小时都过得那么慢，也都不能证明他们活得长了。因为一旦他们没有杂务缠身，他们就会因无

事可做、不知如何利用空闲或打发光阴而坐立不安，他们会急于找点儿其他的事情来做，而在这期间他们会厌倦烦躁。确实如此，正如宣布了一场角斗开始时，或人们期待某个展览或娱乐活动时的心情一样——他们急于想跳过这中间的一段时间。任何期盼已久的事情的拖延对他们来说都是漫长而乏味的，真正享受的时间是短暂而快速的，而且会由于他们的过失而使这享受更短促，因为他们急匆匆地追求一种又一种享受，不能固守一种欲望。他们过的每天不是长久的而是令人懊恼的；而另一方面，在他们酗酒嫖娼的过程中，夜晚似乎也变得短暂了，因而就有癫狂的诗人们编撰故事描绘朱庇特沉溺于做爱的欢愉，把夜晚也加长了一倍，以此来助长人性的弱点。他们援引神来支持这些人，让神也变得荒淫无度，还为他们开脱，当成我们过错的先例，这除了加剧恶行还能有什么意义？他们付出高昂代价得到的夜晚对这些人来说难道不是太短暂了吗？他们等待夜幕而失去白昼，惧怕天明而丧失夜晚。

即便在极尽淫乐之时他们也会因种种恐惧而不安、焦虑。就在纵情享乐达到高潮时，烦躁忧虑的情绪悄然而至，“还能持续多长时间?”这种情绪曾使国王们对手中的权力发出哀叹，想到末日无可避免终究会来，他们感到惶惶不可终日，远远胜过好运带给他们的快乐。当波斯国最骄横不可一世的国王①派遣军队跨过广袤的平原时，数不胜数的军队只能估量其规模，想到百年之后这庞大的队伍将无人幸免一死，他不禁潸然泪下。而就是他这个泪流满面的人给他们带来厄运，

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① 指波斯帝国国王薛西斯，他于公元前480年入侵希腊。他在色雷斯的多里司科斯的平原上摆下他庞大的陆军，因人数太多，只能通过计算一块可容纳1万人的面积，然后乘以面积的倍数来估计。

使他们丧生于海洋、陆地、战场、溃逃路上，用不了多久就会全军覆没，而他还在担心他们的百年大限。

是什么使他们即使在高兴时也会忐忑不安？因为他们的快乐理由不足。快乐是被煽动起来的，没有根基。身居高位的快乐都并不牢靠，那些快乐他们自己都承认是可悲的，又何足挂齿？所有的好运都会产生忧患，受到命运垂青时，总是我们最不信命的时候。为了保住已有的成就我们需要其他的成就；为了证明已经实现的祈祷我们需要再次祈祷。任何意外所获都是不稳定的，地位越高越容易跌倒。注定要倒台的东西，不能为任何人带来快乐。所以对于那些经过千辛万苦获得的成就要用更大的辛苦保住的人来说，生活必定不仅短暂而且痛苦。他们辛辛苦苦获得想要的一切，又要忧心忡忡保有所得的一切，而这当中他们从没有考虑过时间成本，而时光流逝，韶华无返。新的嗜好代替了旧的，希望激起更多的希望，野心衍生更大的野心。他们没有设法结束苦难，只是不断为它变换理由。我们发现自己在公众中享有的荣耀是一种痛苦，但是却为他人的荣耀花费更多的时间。我们不再费力争当候选人，却又开始为其他人拉票。我们已经摆脱了当起诉人的烦恼，却又承担起当法官的麻烦。有人不再当法官却当起法院院长，在挣钱管理别人财产的工作中年事日高，于是又将所有时间用于照看自己的财产。马略结束戎马生涯却又开始忙于执政官的工作；昆提乌斯很快完成独裁者之职，但又在犁地时被召回；西庇奥在还没有足够的指挥经验时就去与迦太基人打仗，打败了汉尼拔，战胜了安提奥库斯，成了杰出的执政官，确保了他弟弟的职位。如果不是他自己禁止，他的塑像就会立在朱庇特的旁边了。但是国家的动荡困扰着拯救国家的人，他年轻时就蔑视那些只应赋予神的荣耀，最终老了，他执意过着流放的生活，并乐在其中。

总有焦虑的原因，或因为富足，或因为窘迫。生活滚滚向前，一个牵绊接着一个牵绊。我们总是渴望悠闲自得的生活，但却从未享受过。

所以，亲爱的保利努斯，从人群中脱身吧。你已经经历了超出自己年龄的太多的狂风暴雨，现在至少应该退隐到一个平静的港湾，想一想经历了多少风浪，多少暴雨——有些是在私人生活中经受的，有些则是在公共活动中。你是积极、勤勉的典范，你的美德长期以来有目共睹，尝试一下，在休闲的生活中如何继续保持。你生命的大部分，当然也是最美的一部分，已经献给了国家，现在也给自己一些时间吧。我不是让你无所事事慵懒怠惰，也不是让你在蒙头大睡和那些大众喜好的娱乐中消磨你自身的能量。这不是休息。当你退隐并享受平和的心境，你会发现有很多比你迄今为止一直积极从事的要重要得多的活动值得你为之忙碌。没错，你是在管理世界的账目，像管理他人的一样严谨，像管理自己的一样仔细，像管理国家的一样认真。在这种难免遭人怨恨的工作中你却赢得了人们的爱戴，但是相信我，读懂自己人生的资产负债单要比看懂玉米生意的负债单更有意义。你要从这光荣、但很难说适于幸福的生活的工作中摆脱出来，恢复你旺盛的精力和承担伟大责任的卓越才能。你要想想年轻时人文学术方面的训练，其目的并非是将成千上万次将玉米称重的工作放心地托付于你。你曾向自己承诺要做更有价值更伟大的事情。他们不缺少称职的、努力工作的人。呆头呆脑的驮畜比纯种马更适合驮重，谁会让马负重而减缓其疾驰的速度？再想想当你勉为其难承担如此繁重的责任时心情是多么焦虑。你解决的是人们吃饱肚子的问题，饥饿的人们既不听你讲理，又不会因受到公平待遇而心平气和，也不会因恳求而让步。最近，就是盖乌斯·凯撒死后的几天里——他死时

还在感到心烦意乱呢（如果逝者也有感情就好了），因为他看到罗马人民还有够七天、或最多八天的食物维持生计，而他还在建桥造船，滥用国家的资源——我们面临着粮食匮乏的最艰难的时刻，比受围困的人的境况更糟。他仿效别国那个威风扫地的疯子国王，几乎毁掉这个城市，造成饥荒，以及饥荒之后全面的崩溃。那么那些负责谷物供应的人们面对石头、武器、火——还有盖乌斯的威胁时怎么想呢？他们以弥天大谎极力掩饰潜藏于国家要害部门的滔天大罪——他们这样做肯定也是情有可原的。某些疾病的治疗是不能让病人了解病情的，要是知道了，会使很多人不治而死。

你应该退休从事这些更安静、更安全、更重要的工作。你认为监督那些狡猾而且不负责任的货主将谷物毫发未损地运进谷仓、照看它们不要在热天受潮霉烂、并确保其重量与数量相吻合的工作与从事神圣高尚的研究是同样的工作吗？通过这些研究你可以了解神的实质，他的意志，他的生活方式，他的形态，知道什么样的命运在等待你的灵魂，当我们从身体解脱出来时自然会将我们安放何处，是什么力量在中心支撑着这个世界所有最重的元素，什么力量使最轻的元素悬浮于上，什么将火送往最高的地方，又是什么使星宿运行变幻有致——你可以不断学到很多无比神奇的其他知识，你真的应该离开那里，全身心投入到研究领域。趁现在血还是热的，就应该将精力投入到更有价值的事情上。这样的生活会使你发现很多值得研究的东西：对美德的热爱与实践、对激情的忘却、生与死的知识，以及心平气和的生活。

是的，那些杂务缠身者的状况确实可怜，但是最不幸的是那些人，他们甚至不是为自己的杂务缠身而辛苦，而是要根据别人的睡觉时间来调整自己的睡眠，根据别人的步法来行走，在爱与恨这些最自主的事情上也要唯他人之命是从。

如果这种人想知道他们的生命多么短促，先让他们想想生命中属于自己的那部分是多么少吧。

所以，当你见到有人屡次官袍加身，或在广场名声大振，不要羡慕他们：这些都是以生命为代价获取的。为了某一年代能以他们的名字命名，他们耗尽自己所有的年代。有些人从事业开始就奋斗，一路拼搏，还没有到达自己雄心壮志的巅峰就结束了生命。有些人忍辱负重爬到至尊无上的地位，却又不禁黯然神伤，因为他们所有的艰辛都不过是为了一块墓志铭。有人年事已高便试图做些调整，产生新的希望，以期显得年轻，却发现羸弱的身体已不堪折腾。一位老者上气不接下气地在法庭上为完全陌生的当事人辩护，企图赢得那些根本不知情的旁观者的掌声，这是很丢人的场面。看到一个人在履行职责时累垮也是很不体面的，他并非因劳累过度而精疲力竭，而是因为自己的生活方式。同样丢人的是一个人在查看账目时咽了气，而那个等待已久的继承人笑着舒了一口气。有件事想起来了，不得不说说。塞克斯图斯·图拉纽斯是公认的办事审慎、认真的老者。当他九十高龄时，在他的请求下盖乌斯·凯撒恩准他退休，于是他让人将他放在床上，全家人聚齐哀悼他，好像他已经归天。整座房子都为老主人的歇息而悲哀，直到他又起来恢复工作。以身殉职真的就那么令人愉快吗？很多人都是这样，自己无力工作时仍想工作。他们挑战身体的虚弱，视暮年为痛苦，无端地认为人一老了就被弃置不用了。法律规定五十以后不当兵，六十以后不进元老院，法律赋予人们赋闲的权力，而人们自己却难以接受。掠夺别人又被人掠夺，互相干扰，彼此不得安宁，你使我痛苦，我使你痛苦。在这过程中，生命流逝，过得差强人意，缺少欢乐，精神状态也未得到改善。没人把死亡放在心上，没人对好高骛远的理想加以限制。确实，还有些人

把身后的事都安顿停当了——规模宏大的墓穴，公共殿堂里的供奉，葬礼时的炫耀，下葬时的铺张。其实，这些人的葬礼只需举着火把和小蜡烛，他们的生命似乎才是最为短暂的①。

① 意思是他们就像儿童一样，因为儿童的葬礼是在晚上举行，因而需要举着火把和蜡烛。

致赫尔维亚的告慰书[①]

最亲爱的母亲，我常常有一种冲动，想要安慰您，但又总是克制住了。促使我斗胆这样做的原因有很多。首先，当我想到即使不能阻止您流泪，至少可以为您抹去泪水时，我会把我自己所有的烦恼放置一边。其次，如果我能先让自己振作起来，肯定也会更有力量让您振作起来。另外，我担心虽然命运已被我征服，但她却可能征服我身边的亲人。所以，在止住自己的伤口流血之后，我倾尽所能，挣扎向前为您包扎伤口。但另一方面，一些其他的考虑又使我踟蹰不前。我意识到您的伤口初创正疼痛难忍，不该马上触动，以防慰藉本身会刺激它、让它发炎：病痛也是一样，没有什么比过早的治疗对它更有害了。所以我在等待，直到您的悲痛慢慢减轻，让时间来软化它，使它可以经受治疗，可以被触动、解决。此外，虽然我查阅了所有最著名的作者关于如何控制和缓解悲痛的著述，但还是找不到任何关于安慰自己的至亲、而自己本身又是他们所哀痛对象的实例，所以在这种尚无前例的情况下，我犹豫了，担心自己非但不能给您安慰，反而会刺激您的悲伤。而且，一个人从自己的棺椁中抬起头来安慰他的至爱亲人，需要的是那些有别于普通平常词汇的新奇话语。但巨大强烈的悲痛会剥夺人们选词遣句的能力，因为

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① 塞内加于公元41年被克劳狄皇帝判处死刑，后改判流放科西嘉岛，直到公元49年才被召回。这封信是塞内加到流放地不久写给母亲赫尔维亚的，试图安慰母亲不要为他悲伤。

悲痛本身往往会抑制声音的发出。无论如何，我会尽最大力量，不是靠小聪明，而是因为我本人就是慰问者，所以自己也能成为最有效的慰藉。因为您从未拒绝我任何事，所以至少这一次也别拒绝我来终结您的忧伤（尽管悲痛总是很顽固的）。

想想由于您的纵容，我对自己作出了怎样的承诺。我毫不怀疑自己对您远比悲伤对您的影响更大，虽然没有什么比悲伤更能影响不幸的人。所以，为了不和它立即发生冲突，我会首先支持它，给它很多鼓励：我会重新揭开、暴露那些已经愈合的伤口。有些人会反对：“这算什么安慰，把已忘却的疾病又找回来，在心灵连一种伤痛都几乎无法忍受的情况下，让它又看到所有的悲痛?”但是想一想，那些危及生命的病尽管经过治疗，还是难以除根，这类病一般来说是要采取逆向疗法的。所以我要让心灵先感受痛苦，给它穿上丧服：这不是温和的处方，而是烧灼与刀割。我想达到什么目的?我要让一个战胜了很多苦难的心灵，羞于为伤痕累累的身体上又出现一个伤口而焦虑。所以让那些人继续哭泣、哀叹吧：长久的安乐生活已经将他们自我放纵的心灵变得很脆弱，让他们受到微小伤痛的威胁就崩溃吧；而让那些长期经受苦难的人们以勇敢坚强来忍受最大的伤痛。长久的不幸确有好的一面，它使饱受折磨的人们最终变得坚忍不拔。

命运从未停止给您带来痛苦，甚至从您出生的那一天都未能幸免。您一出生，不，甚至您正在出生时就失去了母亲，在生命的初始就有了被遗弃的感觉。您在继母的照顾下长大，是您用亲生女儿般的敬重与孝顺使她成为一位名副其实的母亲。然而，即便有一个好继母也会让孩子付出很大代价。正当您期盼舅舅的到来时，您却失去了他——一个最善良、最优秀、最勇敢的人。祸不单行，命运似乎唯恐还不够残酷，

不到一个月的时间您又掩埋了给了您三个孩子的最亲爱的丈夫。噩耗传来，您还沉浸在悲痛之中，而三个孩子又都不在身边。厄运似乎有意集中到这个时候，使您的悲哀无处宣泄。危难与恐惧不断向您袭来，我不再一一赘述。但最近同样的厄运再次袭来，您放三个孙子出门，取回来的却是他们的三具尸骨。我的儿子在您的怀抱中，在您的亲吻中死去。掩埋他不到二十天，您就听到我被带走的消息。这是唯一您还没有经历过的——为生者悲伤。

在所有刺痛您的伤害中，我承认，这最近的是最令您伤心的，岂止是切肤之痛，简直是撕心裂肺、五内俱焚。但是正如新兵，即使表皮受点伤也会尖叫，害怕医生给他处理伤口，好像那比刀刺都可怕；而老兵呢，即使伤势很重，也会忍着一声不吭地让医生清理伤口，似乎身体不是自己的，所以您现在必须勇敢地等待疗伤。好啦，把那些哭泣、悲伤、以及女人们通常悲哀的聒噪表示都收起吧。如果您还没有学会如何承受不幸，那些痛苦您就白受了。我看起来对您这样够胆大了吧？我没有隐藏您所遭受的任何苦难，而是把它们全堆到您面前。

我已经在勇敢对您进行治疗了，是因为我决定要战胜您的苦痛，而不是自欺欺人。而且，如果我首先就能表明，在我这样的情况下，我所有的一切都不足以称为不幸（更不用说会让那些亲属感到不幸了），然后，我能够向您表明您的命运同样不是痛苦的，因为您的命运完全取决于我的命运，我想我就能征服您的痛苦了。

首先，我要陈述一个事实，这是您出于爱而希望听到的：我并没有受苦。我说得清楚些，如果能的话，那种处境，就是您以为会令我崩溃的处境，是可以忍受的；但是如果您不相信，至少我对自己能够在正常情况下别人感到很不幸的处

境中活得很愉快这点是很满意的。没有必要相信别人对我的传言，我肯定地告诉您我并没有什么不幸的，这样您就不要半信半疑地焦虑苦恼了。为让你放心，我还要告诉您，根本就没有什么能让我不幸。

我们生在原本优越的环境中，是我们放弃了这种环境。幸福的生活不需要什么优良的装备，这是自然的本意：每一个人都能使自己幸福，外部的东西并不重要，顺境与逆境都没有多大的影响：顺境不能抬高圣贤，逆境也无法降低他，因为他总是尽力最大可能地依靠自己，从自身获取全部的乐趣。什么？我把自己称为先哲了？当然没有。如果我能，我不仅会否认自己是不幸的，我还要声称自己是最幸运的，已经离神很近了。正如现在这样，为了尽最大的努力来减少不幸，我现在已经拜倒在智者的脚下，由于自己还未坚强到可以自助，我就投身于另一阵营——我是指那些能够很轻松地保护自己及其追随者的人们。他们命令我像站岗的卫兵一样站稳，还要能够尽早地预见命运的进攻与突袭。命运总是猛烈袭击那些毫无预警的人，而那些对其早有预警的人就会轻而易举地抵挡她的进攻。敌人的到来只会使那些疏于警戒的人溃不成军，而对于那些在战争来临之前早就列队整装、从容应对的人们来说，就可以轻松地抵御敌人的首次进攻，而首次冲击往往是最猛烈的。我从来未敢信任命运，即便有时她看似平和。所有她好心施惠于我的东西——金钱、官职、权势——我都束之高阁，以便将来她索要之时可以直接从那里拿走而不必烦扰我。我一直与这些东西保持很大的距离，所以她只是将它们取走了，而不是夺走。如果不是最初被命运的恩惠所骗，人们是不会在受到她的攻击时溃散的。那些喜欢她的礼物，把它们当成自己永远所有，并想因之受到别人羡慕的人，在那虚假短暂的快乐背弃了他们虚伪、幼稚、

无视长久快乐的心智时，就会变得低三下四、伤心欲绝。但是，在顺境中不飘飘然的人在形势发生变化时就不会崩溃。他已经经过考验变得坚忍不拔，保持面对任何境遇都不可战胜的心态：因为幸运时他已练就自己应对逆境的力量。所以我从来不相信在人们祈望得到的东西中有什么是真正的好处，而且我发现它们都是空虚的，外表涂有耀眼诱人的色彩，而内部全然无法与之相匹配。而现在，在这些所谓的罪恶中，我并没发现什么可怕或险恶的东西，一般的看法都是危言耸听。当然，“流放”这词是由于某种成见和公众的信服而传到耳朵里的，那么刺耳，让听者感到郁闷、厌恶。因为这是大众的看法，而智者总的说来并不接受大众的看法。

所以，把这多数人的判断放到一边，因为这些人被事情的表面所蒙蔽，不管他们相信表象的原因是什么，还是让我们好好看看流放的真实意思吧：很清楚，就是换个地方。我不应该缩小它的力量抹掉它最坏的特点，所以我同意，换个地方会带来诸如贫穷、耻辱、蔑视这些弊端。这些我会在后面谈到，同时还要谈谈更换处所所带来的苦恼。

“被驱逐出自己的国家，这简直难以忍受。”好吧，看看这群人，偌大的罗马几乎容纳不下他们，而这些人大部分都是背井离乡。他们从自己的城市或属地，应该说从世界各地，聚集到一起，有的心怀抱负，有的履行公务，有的肩负使命，有的就是想找一个乌七八糟的地方以方便自己沉溺于某种恶习，有的怀着对人文研究的热爱，有的参观公演，有的为了友谊，有的精力旺盛来寻得一方广阔天地以展示自己的才能，有的出卖色相，有的推销辩才。各色人等都迫不及待地涌入这个既看重美德也放纵恶行的城市。挨个问问他们来自何方，你会发现大多数人是背井离乡来到一个伟大、漂亮，但不属于自己的城市。且不说罗马这个堪称属于所有人的城市，看

看其他地方，每个城市里大部分人口都是移民。且不说那些位置优越方便而吸引很多人的城市，单那些人烟稀少满是石头的岛屿，西阿苏斯和赛里婆斯，吉阿鲁斯和柯苏拉，你会发现在所有这些流放地都有人愿意逗留。在这到处都是陡峭岩石的不毛之地能找到什么？还有比这里资源更匮乏的地方吗？还有比这里的人更野蛮的吗？还有比这里的地形更崎岖不平的吗？还有比这里的气候更反复无常的吗？然而，在这里居住的外来人比本地人还多。所以更换处所并不就是苦事，连这样的地方都能吸引人们离开自己的家乡。我曾无意中听人说过，在人的精神中有一种天生的不安分和渴望易地而居的冲动，人有一种求变、不安分的禀赋，它使人在任何地方都不能安于静止不动，而是到处奔走，向往那些已知的未知的地方，如同一个流浪者无法忍受止步不前，而主要以猎奇为乐。想想它的起源其实并不奇怪。它不是起源于质重、尘世的物质，而是来自天国的精神，而天国的东西的本质就是永动，以极快的速度流动驱走。看看那些点亮世界的星宿，没有一个是静止的。太阳永不停止地运行，从一个地方到另一个地方，虽然它同宇宙一起旋转，但其实是与天宇背道而驰。它经过黄道十二宫，不停运行，从一点到另一点，它的运动是永恒的。所有的行星都旋转而过，按不可抗拒的自然规律，从一开始就从一点到另一点地运行。经过固定的年限，完成巡行的路程之后，它们会重新开始，按先前的路线运行。人的思想成分如神造之物一样，所以当神造的自然在不停的极速运动中找到乐趣，甚至得以自我存续时，想到人们会反对迁移，反对易地而居该是多么的愚蠢啊。

好了，现在把您的注意力从天上转到人间吧，您会看到，所有的国家和民族都改变了居所。希腊的城市为什么建立在荒蛮的土地之上？为什么我们在印度人和波斯人中听到马其

顿语？塞西亚和所有凶悍野蛮部落占据的广阔地区上却出现了蓬托斯沿岸的希腊城市，那里漫长的严冬和与天气相匹配的土著人的野蛮性格都无法阻止人们迁徙的活动。在亚洲有一群雅典人；米利都向那里派出足够的人员对七十五个城市进行殖民化；被下游海水冲刷的整个意大利海岸曾经是大希腊。亚洲声称伊特鲁里亚人归她所有；提尔人住在非洲，腓尼基人住在西班牙；希腊人迁入高卢，而高卢人移到希腊；比利牛斯山没有挡住日耳曼人迁徙的通道——走过没人踩过的道路，穿过无人知晓的土地，他们挑战人类不安分的特性，随后又接来了妻子、孩子和年迈的父母。有些人长期流浪并未刻意选择落脚地，但是旅途的疲劳使他们随即定居在一个最近的地方；有些人通过武力在别国立住了脚。有些部落在寻找未知地区时全部被大海淹没了，有些又因为给养殆尽而陷入进退两难的境地，于是便定居下来。人们背井离乡迁往别处的原因不尽相同，有的因为敌军进攻城市沦陷而逃离，失去自己的家园而被迫远走他乡；有些因民事纠纷而被驱除；有些是因为人口太多而被迫移民；有些是因为疫病，或地震，或土地贫瘠物资匮乏实在无法生存；还有那些关于沿海地区非常富足的夸大其词的报道，使有些人抵不住诱惑。不同的原因使不同的人离家出走，但至少这一点是清楚的——任何东西都没有停留在它的起点。人类总是在运动，大千世界每天都有变化——新的城市建立起来，新的国名出现了，旧的消失了，或者被更为强大的国家吞并。但是这些国家的迁徙除了使一个民族离境出走还有别的意义吗？我为什么要和您兜这么大圈子？为什么不厌其烦提到安特诺建立帕塔维乌姆，伊万德将阿卡迪亚王国建立在台伯河畔？狄俄墨得斯和其他人怎样？他们既是征服者，又是被征服者，特洛伊战争把他们撒落在他乡的土地上。唉，罗马帝国本身就曾把流放者当

成它的缔造者，就是那个人，当他的故国沦陷后怀着对得胜者的恐惧，被迫带着几个幸存者，背井离乡，长途跋涉，来到意大利。接着，这个民族又在每个行省建了多少殖民地！罗马人每攻克一地，便在那里定居下来。老百姓自愿加入这样的移民行列，甚至连老人也会离开自己家的祭坛，移居海外。这一点不需进一步阐明了，但我要还要加上一个您眼前的例子：就是这个岛屿，它的居民就在经常更换。更不用说那些年长日久的已经说不清了的事了，现在住在马赛的希腊人，在他们离开福西斯后首先就定居在这个岛上，后来不知什么原因他们迁走了，是因为气候恶劣，还是因为看到意大利人权倾天下，抑或是因为缺少海港。但显然不是由于当地人的野蛮，因为他们在高卢时就居住在当时最凶蛮不开化的人中间。随后，利古里亚人来到这个岛，西班牙人也来了，证据便是他们有着相似的风俗习惯：科西嘉人戴的头巾、穿的鞋都和坎塔布里亚人相同，使用的一些词汇也相同——只有一部分，因为他们的语言在与希腊语和意大利土语融合过程中，总体上已经失去了本地的特征。接下来，罗马公民的两个属地的居民又被带到这里定居，一个是马略遣送来的，另一个是苏拉遣送来的。这个贫瘠不毛之地人口变更得却如此频繁！总之，您很难找到一个国家仍然只住着本土的原住民。各地都是五方杂处，四海熔融，一拨儿接着一拨儿：这伙人向往的是那伙人看不上的；一个人赶走了别人，另一个人又把他赶出去。所以命运注定任何东西都不会永远保持一成不变。

为了给真正的迁徙以补偿，并忘掉由于流放所引发的其他不便，罗马最博学的人法罗认为，我们无论走到哪里，所面对的自然的秩序都是相同的，这一点足够补偿了。马库斯·布鲁特斯认为流放者自己的美德是随身携带的，这一点就

足够了。即便有人认为这两点分开来看都不足以慰藉流放者，他也得承认两者结合在一起就具有无上的力量。因为无论走到哪儿，只要有宇宙的本性和个人的德行这两种最宝贵的东西陪伴，我们失去的就微不足道了。相信我，这是造物主的意旨，无论是全能的神，创造巨著的无形力量，以均等压力渗透于所有从最大到最小物质的神圣精神，或命运之神及不可改变的因果顺序——我认为，这就是他的意旨，即我们财产中最没有价值的东西才会被置于别人的掌控之下。人类最好的东西是不受人类控制的：它既不能被赠予更不能被取走。自然所创造的伟大、辉煌的世界，以及注视它、惊叹它，并成为其中最耀眼部分的人的思想，是我们永恒的财产，将与我们同在。所以，满怀热切的希望，挺直胸膛，让我们以勇敢的步伐快速按境遇所指示的方向行进，让我们行走于任何国度：这个世界上没有流放地，因为对于人类来说没有什么地方是异国他乡，从地球表面的任何一个点遥望苍穹，神的领地与人之间的距离都是相等的。因此，只要我的眼睛不会离开那些永远看不够景象；只要我能仰望太阳、月亮，凝视其他的行星；只要我能追踪它们的盈昃升落，发现它们运行快慢的周期和原因；只要我能看到所有夜空中闪烁的星宿——有些原地不动，有些并未远行而是绕地环行，有些倏忽弹出，有些火花四射令人炫目缭乱，像是要坠落人间，抑或又拖着闪亮长尾一扫而过；只要我能够与它们交流，像人类至今可以做到的那样，与神结盟；只要我的心可以永远向上，努力追寻这类的光景——那么我立于何方又有什么关系呢？

“但是这个国家并不富足，没有苍翠繁茂、果实累累的树木；没有可供航行并以其河道之水灌溉国土的大河；它物产匮乏，连自己的居民都难以为继，更无他国所希缺的东西，没有贵重的大理石可以开采，没有金银矿脉可挖掘。”但是只

对世俗的东西感兴趣是狭隘的心理，应该将其引向万方俱在、万方俱亮的东西。还须想到的是，由于人们对虚假物品的随意相信，世俗的东西会妨碍人们对真实物品的认识。柱廊越长，大厦建得越高，步道越宽，避暑洞穴挖得越深，餐厅的穹顶盖得越大，天国的景象也就越多地被遮蔽。命运将你抛向一个地方，在那里最豪华的住处不过就是一间棚屋。如果你知道关于罗慕路斯①小屋的故事而能勇敢地忍受这一点，那么你真的就会有一种无所谓的态度，而这也是少许的慰藉。你应这样说："我想，这个简陋的小屋是庇护美德的，当人们看到那里有正义、节制、智慧、虔诚、能正确分配责任的制度，人与神的知识，它随之就会变得比任何庙堂都壮丽了。能够聚集如此多的高尚品德的地方不能算是狭小，能与此相伴的流放不能说是痛苦的。"

布鲁图斯②在他的《论品德》一文中说，他看到马塞卢斯③在米提勒涅流放时过着人性所能享有的快乐生活，而且对人文学科产生了从未有过的兴趣。而且，他加了一句说，当他打算离开马塞卢斯返回罗马时，他觉得他自己要被流放，而不是把别人留在了流放地。马塞卢斯感到这时能因流放而赢得布鲁特斯的好感比因执政官之职赢得全国的好感要幸运得多！因为自己留在了流放地而让别人感到他自己才是个流放者，这是怎样的一个人啊？赢得别人，一个甚至连他的亲戚加图都尊崇的人的赞赏该是一个什么样的人④？布鲁图斯

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① 相传罗慕路斯是母狼哺育的两个男婴之一，罗马城的奠基者和第一个皇帝。

② 马可斯·布鲁图斯（前85年-前42年）是晚期罗马共和国的一名元老院议员，他组织并参与了对凯撒的谋杀。

③ 马塞卢斯曾于公元前51年任执政官，他是凯撒的死敌。

④ 布鲁图斯和加图是亲戚，很受加图的尊崇。

还说盖乌斯·凯撒不肯在米提勒涅停船，因为让一个伟大的人饱受屈辱他实在看不过去。确实，元老院接受了公众将他召回的请求，他们那么急切，那么忧伤，那天他们好像都与布鲁图斯有同感，好像不是为马塞卢斯请愿而是为他们自己，如果他回不来，他们将要去流放。但是在布鲁图斯不忍离去，凯撒不忍看他被流放时候，他收获的要多得多，因为两者都是证明：布鲁图斯因把他留下自己返回而伤心，而凯撒因惭愧而脸红。您怀疑马塞卢斯这样伟大的人物会经常鼓励自己，以平和的心态来忍受流放吗？“没有国家并不会痛苦，通过深入的研究您已经明白了，对于一个聪明的人来说每个地方都是他的国家。另外，那个使你被流放的人不是连续十年也都远离他的祖国吗？当然，他是为了拓展疆土——但他确实离开了自己的国家。看啊，他现在应征去了非洲，那里战事一触即发；去了西班牙，那里正重拾溃败的残部；到了危机四伏的埃及——简而言之，到了整个世界——那里的人虎视眈眈伺机反抗千疮百孔的罗马帝国。他要首先面对什么问题？在什么地方立住脚？他自己的胜利进程使他奔波于世界各地。让列国都尊敬他、仰慕他吧，而你只要有布鲁图斯这样的仰慕者就可以心满意足地生活！”

马塞卢斯那时承受着流放生活，虽然穷困，但是易地而居并未使他的心有所改变。穷困并非罪恶，任何一个人，只要还没到贪婪、奢侈到疯狂的地步，就会认同这一点。贪婪和奢侈会毁掉一切。维持一个人的生活需要多么微不足道的一点点！如果他有什么德行的话谁会差这一点点？就我而言，我知道自己失去的不是财富而是那些分心的事。身体的需要微乎其微，只要不受冻，能吃饱喝足有营养就行。如果再渴望更多的东西就会增加我们的恶癖，而不是我们的所需。我们不需搜遍海洋，或屠宰动物来填充我们的肚腹，或到天涯

海角那不知名的海滨捕捉贝类海产。愿神诅咒那些穷奢极欲的人，他们骄奢的触角已超出了帝国的疆界，引发了嫉恨。他们远去斐西斯狩猎以填储自己那自命不凡的厨房，他们不知羞耻地向帕提亚人索要禽类，我们还未遭到这些人的报复。他们从各地搜寻那些刁嘴馋舌的家伙们喜闻乐见的食物。从天涯海角弄来食物，他们那被奢靡的饮食宠溺了的肠胃根本无法接受，吐是为了吃，吃是为了再吐，从世界各地搜刮来的美食大餐他们甚至无法消化。对此鄙夷的人，贫穷会对他有什么不好吗？对渴望这种生活的人来说，贫穷对他更有益：不情愿中他就得到了医治。即便在强迫下他也不吃药，一段时间内他无法得到那些东西，至少看起来也就和他不想要一样了。盖乌斯·凯撒这个人我认为是自然造就的职位最高、人最邪恶的一个典型，他一天要吃掉价值一千万塞斯特斯①的食物，虽然所有人都费尽心思来帮他，他却仍想不出如何一顿饭耗掉三个行省进贡的钱财的办法。可怜虫，只有昂贵的菜肴才能引起他们的食欲。而之所以昂贵并非由于味道香、口感好，而是由于它们珍稀、得来不易。从另一方面说，如果这些人都改邪归正了，那些伺候肠胃的技艺哪儿还有用武之地呀？哪儿还需要进口贸易，砍伐森林，搜罗海洋呀？大自然已将制作食物的一切准备齐全分布于各地，而人们却视而不见，反而各国搜寻，不惜远渡重洋，本来花一点点钱就可以满足的口腹之欲，他们却不惜重金。我想对他们说："为什么你们要乘船远航？为什么要武力对付牲畜和人类？为什么总是惊恐万状狼奔豕突？为什么财富堆积如山？你真的需要想想自己的身体才多小。明明只能容纳一点却总是想要多多，这难道不是疯狂或神经严重错乱吗？所以虽然你可以提

① 古罗马的货币。

高收入扩大地产，但是你永远无法扩充身体的容量。虽然你的生意经营不错，打仗也能发横财，虽然你可以狩猎，到处掠取食物，你却没有地方储存这些给养。你为什么想要得到这么多东西？可以肯定，我们的祖先会不高兴，他们的德行至今还支撑着我们的恶习，他们用自己的双手获取食物，他们席地而睡，他们住的地方没有金子闪闪发光，他们的庙宇没有镶嵌宝石——所以那时候他们在粘土做的神像前庄严发誓，祈求它们，宁可回到敌阵去死也不会违背誓言①。可以肯定，我们的独裁者②在接见萨姆奈特使节时，还亲手做着最简单的饭（这手曾多次摧毁敌人，将月桂花环③放在卡彼托奈山丘的朱庇特膝上）——他不如我们时代的阿皮休斯④幸福，阿皮休斯所在的那个城市，哲学家曾被说成是腐蚀青年的人而被驱除，他作为烹调技师用他的教导亵渎了这个时代。" 关于他的故事值得一听。当他在厨房花光了一亿塞斯特斯，当他在狂喝豪饮中耗尽了所有帝国的馈赠与巨额国家税收时，迫于债务的重压，他第一次查看了自己的账务，算计出账上只剩一千万塞斯特斯，而靠一千万塞斯特斯生活无异于要过食不果腹的日子，所以他服毒自尽了。有一千万塞斯特斯还认为是贫穷，多么奢侈！你又怎么会认为重要的是钱财的数量而不是心态呢？有人因为有一千万塞斯特斯而心生

① 指的是古罗马的将军雷古勒斯。他在公元前255年被迦太基人俘获，按传统，应被囚禁于迦太基，除非按"凭誓获释"的规定，作为和谈的代表他才可以回罗马。据说，雷古勒斯回到罗马后力劝元老院拒绝迦太基人的提议，而后遵守自己的誓言又回到迦太基受死。

② 指马尼乌斯·克里乌斯，他因打败萨姆奈特人、萨宾人和皮洛士人而出名。

③ 这是胜利者的特权。

④ 阿皮休斯是一个声名狼藉的美食家。

畏惧，别人求之不得的，他却躲之不及服毒而死。不过真的，对于一个心态反常的人来说，最后的豪饮乃最为风光之时，此时，他不仅是在享受，而且还在炫耀他那盛大的宴会，展示他的恶习，引起人们关注他那粗俗的表演，唆诱青年人效仿他（那些人即便没有坏人做榜样也会自然而然受到影响）——再后来，就是他真的服食毒药。这就是这种人的命运，他们衡量财富不是用界限固定的理性标准，而是以放荡不羁、为所欲为、反复无常的有害的生活方式。任何东西都无法满足贪心欲壑，但是区区少量就可以让自然的天性知足。所以流放的贫困生活并非苦难，再贫困的流放地让一个人丰衣足食总还可以。

“但是，”有人说，“流放地会让人怀念自己的服装和房子。”这些也只有在他需要时才会想念——而他既不缺房子又不缺衣服，因为身体对于遮蔽之物的需求和对食物的需求一样是很少的。而且自然也并未让人类生存的必需品难以获取。但是他非要将布料染上浓浓的紫色，用金线编织，并饰以五颜六色的图案。如果他感到穷困，那是他自己的问题。即便将所有他失掉的东西还给他，你也是枉费心机，因为一旦流放回来，他会感到更加失落，因为他想得而得不到的东西远远多于他流放时失去的财富。但是他必须有家具，这些家具光彩照人，因为上面摆放着知名艺术家制作的金容器、古代的银盘、因只有几个疯子想有而显得很值钱的铜器，挤满整个房子的奴隶，无论房子有多大，还有那些因拼命喂食而身体肥硕的驮畜，以及从各地采运来的大理石。虽然这些东西堆积成山，仍不能满足他那贪婪的灵魂：正如某人并非由于缺水而是由于极度内热对水产生渴求，喝多少水都无济于事，因为那不是渴，而是一种病。不仅仅钱和食物是这样的，所有不是因为缺乏、而是因为贪婪这种恶癖而产生的欲望都具

有同样的性质。无论堆积多少，都不能表示贪欲结束，而只不过是它的一个阶段。所以将自己限制在自然设定的范围内的人，不会自觉贫困，而那些越过限制的人无论多么富有却永远为贫穷所困扰。即便在流放地也能找到生活的必需品，相反即使身在王国中，也感受不到富足。是思想创造了财富，这样的财富与我们同往流放地，在荒无人烟的艰苦地方，它可以找到充足的食物来滋养我们的身体，尽享其物产。钱与神灵无关，同样也与心智无关。所有那些未受教化且受制于身体的心灵所崇拜的东西——大理石、金子、银子、光洁的大圆桌——都是世俗的负担，一个纯洁、深谙其本质的灵魂不会喜欢它们，因为它轻浮且没有障碍，一旦从体内释放，便一定会飞扬直上。同时，由于不受四肢及裹挟我们的重负的阻碍，它能以带有翅膀的快速飞翔的思想纵览神异之物。灵魂是自由的，类似于神的，与整个宇宙及所有的时间平等，它永远不会被流放，它的思想环绕整个天宇，行走于过去和未来的所有时间。这不幸的身体，灵魂的桎梏与囚牢，被抛来抛去，惩治、掠夺、疾病肆虐其上。然而，灵魂本身是圣洁、永恒的，不受暴力攻击的。

如果您认为我仅仅是用哲学家的说教轻描淡写地讲述穷困的历练，把穷困说成除非本人认为是个负担，否则没人能感觉到的，那么首先想想：到目前为止大多数人都是穷困的，而您却看不到他们比富人更阴郁和焦虑。其实，我倒觉得他们更幸福，因为他们的心灵较少受到困扰。咱们接下来再谈富人：他们多么经常地就像穷人一样地生活！他们出国时行李要受限制，每当要加快行程时，就得解散大批的随从。在军队服役时，由于军营纪律禁止奢侈，他们才能带多么少的行李！并非只有在特殊时间和场合他们才在需求方面被置于与穷人同等的水平：当他们一旦厌倦了富人的生活，他们会

找出几天坐在地上吃饭，把那些金银容器搁置一旁，使用起陶制的器皿。真是疯了，有时竟然向往自己总是惧怕的那种生活状况。多阴暗的心理！多么无知盲目，他们畏惧贫困，却又以模仿贫困为乐！从我自己来说，每当我回顾往古那些范例，我都会为贫穷寻找慰藉而感到惭愧，因为奢侈竟已到了如此地步：一个流放者的津贴竟然比过去重要人物的遗产还多。众所周知，荷马有一个奴隶，柏拉图有三个，而芝诺，严格而富有生气的斯多葛哲学的创始人，却没有奴隶。如果不是本人自己亲口说出自己非常可怜的境遇，谁会从这些方面说他们很不幸呢？门尼涅斯·阿格里帕以调解贵族与平民之间的矛盾来维护社会的和平安宁，他死后是公众捐款埋葬的。当阿提利乌斯·雷古勒斯在非洲追击迦太基人的时候，他给元老院写信说，他家的雇工走了，家里的田地无人照看了，元老院投票决定在雷古勒斯不在家的时候，他家的田地由国家照管。自家无奴隶而让罗马人民成了他家的佃户，这难道不值得吗？西庇奥女儿们的嫁妆来自国库，因为她们的老爸没给她们留下任何东西：无疑罗马人民为西庇奥捐赠一次也是对的，因为他不断强迫迦太基人进贡。女儿们的丈夫，有了罗马人民做他们的岳父是多么幸福！你认为那些把当伶人的女儿以一百万塞斯特斯的嫁妆出聘的人会比自己孩子由元老院监护、收到的嫁妆是可靠铜币的西庇奥还快乐吗？有谁会蔑视家世如此显赫的贫穷？西庇奥置办不起女儿们的嫁妆，雷古勒斯缺少干活的人手，门尼涅斯无钱办葬礼时，知道这些，流放者还会怨恨缺这少那吗？难道这些人要什么有什么，会更让我们尊敬？有这些人为贫穷辩护，贫穷不仅不是罪恶，反倒成了荣誉。

有人可能会回答，“有些事情单独发生尚可忍受，同时发生则难忍受，你为什么非要分开来谈呢？易地而居如果仅是

地点的改变，是可以忍受的。贫穷若不失体面也可忍爱——丢掉体面这一件事就足以令人崩溃。”在回答这个想用一大堆不幸来吓唬我的人时，应该这样说：“如果你有力量对付某一方面的不幸，你就能对付所有方面的。一旦道德能使思想变得坚韧，它就会使各方面都变得刀枪不入。如果贪欲这一人类最难遏制的毛病不再能控制你，野心就不会挡道。如果你把自己的末日不看做惩罚而视为自然规律，把对死亡的恐惧从胸中驱逐就不会再有恐惧胆敢进入。如果你认为性欲之于男人不是愉悦而是为了繁殖后代，一旦你能摆脱这种植根于身体命脉的强烈而有破坏作用的激情，那么其他的欲望就会悄悄离你而去。理智击溃恶习不是各个击破，而是一举全面击溃：胜利是最终的、全面的。”你认为耻辱可以影响哪个完全依靠自己、超然于大众信念的智者吗？可耻地死去比耻辱更糟糕：而苏格拉底走进监狱时的表情同他过去蔑视三十僭主时①一样——他的到来甚至使监狱一扫耻辱，因为只要苏格拉底在，那里就不算监狱。谁能无视这样的事实竟然认为马库斯·加图两次竞争地方长官和执政官的职位失败是耻辱？耻辱属于地方长官和执政官的职务，而这两个职务因加图而光荣。没有人会被他人蔑视，除非他自己先就蔑视自己。卑贱低下的心理对于这类的侮辱是非常敏感的；而如果一个人能使自己面对最痛苦的灾难，并且能击败曾压倒别人的邪恶，他面对的那些苦难就像是佩戴了一枚神圣的勋章。我们一般

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① 公元前404年，斯巴达人打败雅典人，结束了长达27年的伯罗奔尼撒战争。这时曾是苏格拉底学生的克里底亚和查米迪斯成立了三十僭主集团。豪权政治代替了民主，这个集团在执政的8个月中就处死了1500人。8个月后，三十僭主集团垮台，民主制度恢复，克里底亚和查米迪斯被处死，苏格拉底也因此受到牵连，也被处以死刑。

倾向于赞赏那些在逆境中表现刚毅的人，所以当阿里斯德岱斯①被带到雅典的法场，所有见到他的人都垂目低吟，好像受到惩罚的不仅是一名正义之士，而且是正义本身。然而一个家伙真的朝他的脸上吐唾沫。他本可以对此感到憎恶，因为他知道只有嘴巴肮脏的人才敢这样做。但是他没有，而是擦了擦脸，笑着对护送的地方官说："警告那个家伙下次不要再这么粗鲁地打哈欠了。"这就是用侮辱来回报侮辱。我知道有人会说，没有比鄙视更令人难以接受了，连死亡都似乎比它舒服。对这些人的话，我的答复是，流放往往还能使人免遭任何鄙视。如果一个伟人倒下了仍能保持伟大，人们不会鄙视他，就像他们踏在倒塌的寺庙上，虔诚的人们照样对它顶礼膜拜，就像它耸立时候一样。

最亲爱的妈妈，既然您没有理由因为我而没完没了地流泪，那么应该是因为您自己的原因而伤心落泪了。这其中原因有二：您是因为自己似乎失去了某些保护而烦恼，或者因为一想到我不在您身边就感到无法忍受。

这第一点，我只少说几句，我知道您心中对亲人的爱只是为他们着想。让那些母亲想想吧，她们因为身为女人缺少权势就剥削孩子的权势；由于自己没有职务，只能通过儿子来寻求权力，不仅花光了儿子的遗产，而且还企图从儿子那里获得遗产，她们假别人以口实让自己的儿子疲于应对。而您为儿子们的所得感到高兴却几乎没有利用过它们；您的慷慨是无限的，却限制我们过分慷慨；当您父亲还健在的时候，您却给有钱的儿子们送礼物。您管理我们遗产的认真程度就像管理自己的，小心谨慎的程度就像管理别人的。您谨慎地利用我们的影响，就好像那是别人的；在我们履行职务期间，

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① 阿里斯德岱斯是雅典稳重派领袖，以廉洁无私著称。

您除了高兴和付出从没有掺和。您的爱从没有考虑个人利益。因而，既然您的儿子被从您身边带走，您也不会觉得缺少了那些东西，因为当儿子是安全和健康时，您从未觉得那些与您有关。

我必须完全从那个真正能使一位母亲感到悲哀的角度来安慰您。您说，“那么我被剥夺了拥抱我最亲爱的儿子的权利，我再也不能感受见到他或和他聊天的快乐了。那个一出现就能抚平我的愁眉的人在哪儿？那个我可以倾诉悲哀的人在哪儿？我们那从未厌倦的聊天哪儿去了？我曾以超出女人的热心，超出母亲的亲近与他分享的研究哪里去了？我们的会面到哪儿去了？那个一见到自己妈妈就总是像个孩子似的不停的欢笑哪儿去了？”除了这些您还提到了我们愉快地聚会和社交的具体的地点，以及能够使我们想起最近一起生活的情形，这些必然都是最敏感的促使您心情极其痛苦的缘由。命运甚至阴谋策划了这一对您的残酷打击，在我被贬黜的前两天，您才离开，心情平静，没有理由对这样的灾难担心、惧怕。如果我们以前就相隔遥远，如果多年不在您身边能使您对这一打击有所准备就好了。直到返回罗马，您都没有享受到儿子在跟前的快乐，却对他不在感到很不习惯了。如果您很早就离开，您就会更勇敢地面对这一缺憾，因为我们之间的距离可以淡化彼此的思念。如果您没有离开，至少还可以享受多看儿子两天的最后的快乐。现在的情况是，残酷的命运作出如此安排，使您没能看到我的倒运，又无法习惯我的不在。但是情况越是不利，您越要鼓起更大的勇气，更勇猛地战斗，像对付一个您了解并经常能打败的敌人。您的血现在不是从未受伤害的身体里淌出，您正是被击打在旧的伤疤上。

您不能因为自己是女人就原谅自己，女人们实际上有极

度悲哀的权利，但不是无休止地悲哀。鉴于此，我们的前辈允许寡妇服丧十个月的时间，为的是采取折中的办法以公开的法令来限制女人们无法抑制的悲痛。他们不是禁止悲哀，只是限制。因为痛失亲人而无休止地悲哀使自己饱受折磨是愚蠢的自我放任，而没有任何表示又是不人性的无情无义。在爱与理智之间最好的折中办法就是既要思念又要克制这种情感。您不会对那种一旦悲痛至死方休的妇人表示尊重吧——您知道有些人儿子死了就穿上丧服，从此不再脱下。您的一生从开始就比她们坚强，因而希望您会更坚强：一个没有任何女性弱点的女人，不应把自己是女人当作借口。当今时代最不能饶恕的罪恶就是淫荡，在这一点上根本不能把您和大多数妇女一起来考量。宝石和珍珠对您都毫无影响，耀眼的财富在您眼里从不是赋予人类的最大的恩惠。在严格的、旧式的家庭中生长的您从未误入歧途去模仿那些即使对良家妇女也是很危险的坏女人。您从未因为自己生儿育女而感到羞惭，似乎年长育子就会被嘲弄；您也没有像其他女人那样总试图以美貌示人，而掩饰自己怀有身孕，似乎那是什么丢人的负担；您也从未以堕胎来摧毁生育的希望；您也没有用颜料和化妆品来惯纵您的容貌；您从来不喜欢那种穿着如同没穿的服装；人们从您身上看到的是无以伦比的服饰，岁月无痕的花容月貌，无上荣光的品德——谦逊。所以您不能以妇女的名义来证明自己有理由悲伤，您已经以自己的美德与那个群体划清界限：您应该像拒绝一切女性恶习一样拒绝眼泪。甚至连女人们也不会允许您在伤痛中一蹶不振，她们会让您迅速度过必要的悲哀，然后在安抚后重新振作起来，您

会乐意记住那些勇气过人不逊须眉的女士们。命运让科妮莉亚①的十二个孩子就剩下两个。如果您要计算她丧失的孩子，她丧失了十个；如果您想评价这些孩子，她失去了格拉古兄弟。但是当她周围的人痛哭着诅咒她的命运时，她不准他们诅咒命运之神，因为命运将格拉古兄弟赐予她，让他们成了她的儿子。这是无愧于这位母亲的儿子，他在群众大会上说："你们想侮辱这位给了我生命的母亲吗？"而母亲的话听起来更是掷地有声。儿子因出生于格拉古家而自豪，母亲因儿子的献身也感自豪。茹提莉亚跟随儿子考塔一起流放，她对儿子的爱如此真诚，宁可随儿子流放，也不愿意独自长相思，直到儿子回来时她才一同返回。可是当儿子官复原职重新得到重用，又成为了一位杰出的公众人物时，他却死了。她以当初和他一起流放的勇气承受他的离世，在他的葬礼之后人们再没有看见她哭过。当他被流放，她显示了勇敢；当他死去，她显示了智慧。什么都不能阻止她表示自己的爱，什么都不能使她无休止地沉溺于无用、无益的悲哀。我希望您能与这样的女士为伍。您总在效仿她们的生活方式，也一定能以她们为榜样控制、克服哀痛。

我知道这不是我们的力量所能掌控的，任何强烈的感情都不是我们能够控制的，尤其是悲哀之情更是无法抑制，因为这种感情是非常强烈的，而且对任何治愈措施都会强烈抵触。有时我们想要击垮它，强咽下痛苦的呻吟，表面上强装

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① 格拉古兄弟的母亲。格拉古兄弟的父亲老提比略·格拉古曾出任前 177 年和前 163 年的罗马执政官。母亲科妮莉亚·阿菲莉加娜来自显赫的西庇阿家族。她的父亲就是大名鼎鼎的阿非利加征服者。据说科妮莉亚·阿菲莉加娜曾拒绝了埃及法老托勒密的求婚，悉心教子并聘请了有名的希腊学者来做家庭教师，使兄弟两人受到了良好的教育。

镇静，却止不住泪水滂沱。有时我们想去看看演出或角斗以分散注意力，但是就在这些娱乐活动的场景中，一点儿小小的事由就会使我们触景生情，使所有努力归于失败。因此最好是战胜悲痛，而不是自欺欺人。因为如果仅仅用娱乐和分散精力的方式来蒙骗，它会撤离，然后又会再次开始，用暂停期间积蓄起的力量，向我们猛烈进攻。而以理智战胜的悲哀却是会永远地平息。因此我不打算给您开出就我所知别人用过的处方，让您分散精力，高兴起来，比如到国外长时间旅游，或用很多时间清理账目，管理财产，或经常参加一种新的活动。这些都短时间有效，它们不能治愈，只是干扰了伤痛。而我不是要转移它，而是要彻底结果它。所以我要引领您寻求那种慰藉，这是所有那些超越命运掌控的人们的避难所：人文学科的研究。这些学习将为您疗伤，它们将驱除您所有的的哀思，即便您从未通晓它们，现在也需要学习它们。就我父亲那种严格的旧式家教所能允许的，您对人文学科即使还没有通晓，也是比较熟悉的了。要是我父亲——他是最好的男人——不那么忠实于祖辈的传统，能让您专心于哲学教学，而不是只对它一知半解就好了——您现在就不需要通过学习获得抵御厄运的知识了，而只要拿来运用就行了。他之所以不太愿意让您从事研究，是因为那些女人不是用书上的知识来获得智慧，而只是当成奢侈的摆设。不过，好在您有一种积极求索的心态，能够在有限的时间内学到很多知识，正规研究的基础已经打好了，现在再去继续学习吧，那会使您有安全感。它们会安慰您，让您高兴，如果它们真的能沁入您的心里，悲痛，以及那些毫无意义的不值一提的苦难引发的焦虑和苦恼，就再也休想扰乱您心，您的心里再也容不下这些，它早已将其他的不快拒之门外。学习是您最可靠的庇护，只有它们可以使您摆脱厄运的紧箍。

不过，在您到达哲学为您提供的庇护所之前，您还必须有一些支持的力量可以依靠：所以我同时还想向您指出您本身就有的慰藉。想想我的兄弟们。只要他们活着，您就没有理由抱怨自己的命运。从他们身上您会很高兴地发现反差很大的优点：一个以自己的能力获得官职，另一个以其智慧对官场不屑一顾。为一个的优秀，另一个的退隐，为二人的挚爱而感到慰藉吧。我很了解我兄弟们内心深处的感情，一个建功立业是为了让您感到光荣，另一个退隐于平静安宁是为了让您能享有闲适。命运为您作出了安排，让您的孩子既能对您有所帮助又能给您带来快乐。这个的显赫地位可以为您提供保护，那个的悠闲生活助您颐养天年。他们竞相侍奉您老人家，两个儿子的挚爱真情会填补一个儿子留下的空缺。我可以十分有把握的预先告诉您，除了儿子的数量，您不会失去任何东西。

这之后，再来想想您的孙子们吧：马尔库斯，这个最可爱的孩子——看到他您就不会再悲伤了，他的拥抱让再大的再近的苦痛都会释然。有他的欢乐什么样的泪水不会止住？听到他快活地喋喋不休谁那被焦虑压抑的心情能不轻松起来？看到他嬉笑打趣的样子谁能不绽放出笑容？无论原先怎么专注于自己的心思，听着那些永远不会令人厌烦的稚嫩童音，谁的注意力能不被吸引、感染？我祈求神保佑他在我们都离去后活得更好！让命运的残酷行径自动消亡、止于我身。让我来代您承受作为母亲和祖母所要遭受的一切苦难吧。让其余的家人都免受侵扰生活幸福吧。如果我能替全家遭罪而使家人免受一切痛苦，我决不会因为没有孩子或被流放而抱怨。拥抱诺瓦提拉吧，她很快就会给您生一个重外孙。我那么爱她，并收养了她，所以失去我，她就像个孤儿，尽管她的亲生父亲还活着。也替我好好爱护她吧。厄运最近夺走了她的

母亲，但您的爱会让她仅仅因为母亲的去世而悲哀，而不会因为母亲的不在而遭罪。现在您得塑造和调理她的性格，在易受影响的年纪，教育会留下更深的印记。让她慢慢习惯您的谈话，按您认为正确的模式成长，即便您只是给她做做榜样，也会让她受益良多。如此神圣的责任对于您来说也是一种疗法，因为只有哲学或有意义的事情才能将痛苦从因爱而悲伤的心中转移。

如果您的父亲还在，我也会将他算作能给您带来莫大安慰的人。正如现在这样，您必须用您对他的爱来判断他对您的爱，这样您就会明白您多么应该为了他而更多地保护自己而不是为了我而牺牲您自己。当过度的悲哀袭击您，逼您屈服时，想一想您的父亲。当然，给了他那么多子孙后代，您不再是他唯一的后代了，但是对于他来说幸福生活的完美全靠您。当他还健在时您抱怨自己活够了就不对了。

到现在为止我还没有谈到最能给您带来安慰的人，您的姐姐，她是最忠实于您的人，也是您可以毫无保留倾诉忧愁的人，还是我们所有孩子视为妈妈的人。您和她泪水交融，在她的怀抱中您才恢复了平静。确实，一直以来她都分享您的情感，但是这次在我的这件事上，她的悲哀却不全是为您。她把我抱在怀里来到罗马，在我长期生病的时候，是她的爱和母亲般的呵护才使我恢复知觉。在我竞选检察官的时候，她支持我，虽然她平日连谈话和大声打招呼都不够自信，但对我的爱使她战胜了羞怯。她的隐居生活，她的谦逊（与现在很多妇女的厚颜相比显得有些保守），她的心平气和，还有她渴望平和安静的保守天性——所有这些都没有阻止她为了我而真正变得雄心勃勃。最亲爱的妈妈啊，她是您恢复精神获得慰藉的源泉。尽您所能紧紧拥抱她吧。悲伤的人总是想回避他们最爱的人，想找个排解忧伤的地方，但是您一定要

把您的想法告诉她。无论您是想保留这种情绪，还是想把它置于一旁，她都会使您不再难过，或者与您分担痛苦。但是，就我对这位优秀女性的智慧的了解，她一定不会让您在这种无益的困苦中消耗精力，她会给您讲述她生活中的一段颇有教育意义的插曲，那件事我也曾亲眼目睹。

在一次出海旅行途中，她失去了自己深爱的丈夫——我的姨夫，她还是个少女时就嫁给了他；她同时承受着悲哀和恐惧的巨大压力，虽然船失事了，她冒着风暴航行，最终安全地把丈夫的尸体运到岸上。啊，有多少妇女行为高尚却默默无闻被人们忘记！如果她有幸生活在过去，那时人们对英雄的行为都大加赞赏，那些才华横溢的人会怎样竞相赞美这样的女士，她不顾自己虚弱的身体，无视连最勇敢的人都会心生畏惧的大海，冒着生命危险以使丈夫能够入土为安，当她一心想的是丈夫的葬礼时，她对自己的处境是无所畏惧的。所有的诗人都盛赞要替丈夫献身的女人，但是冒着生命危险送丈夫的尸体去墓地的行为更高尚。经历同样的危险却鲜有人称赞，那是一种更伟大的爱。

这件事之后，人们对很多事情就不会感到惊奇了：在她丈夫担任埃及总督的 16 年中，人们从未见她在公共场合露面，她从不在家里接待本地人，从未请求丈夫为她做什么，也从未允许别人求她办什么事。结果是，在一个盛行闲言碎语，对执政者竭尽讥讽辱骂的行省，连小心翼翼唯恐犯错误的人都难逃绯闻诟病，而她却被当成完美非凡的典范，让那些传播闲话的人三缄其口（这是很难做到的，因为这里连一些很不着边的闲话都会流传甚广），而直到如今，人们还在希望能再看到一个和她品行一样的人，虽然根本不可能。在一个省份生活 16 年能够得到认可是很了不起的，在那里不为人们所注意更是了不起。我回顾这些事情不是为了说她品德多

么高尚（讲述得这么概括，对她的美德是不公平的），而是让您了解一个高尚女性，她没有被那些必然与权势相伴而来又因而为人们所诅咒的野心与贪婪所征服，她面对海难在一只破船上无所畏惧地与死去的丈夫在一起，没有企图自己逃生，而一心想把丈夫带回家安葬。您必须也鼓起这样的勇气，驱除心中的悲伤，坚强起来，使人们看到您没有因为有这些孩子而后悔。

然而，无论您怎么做，都会经常不可避免地想到我，任何其他的孩子都不会这样经常地让您想念，并不是您不爱他们，而是因为越是疼痛的地方，人们自然会更多地要去触摸。所以您必须想到我现在是幸福而快乐的，就像生活在非常舒适的环境中。说环境舒适是因为现在我心无旁骛，可以自由地做自己想做的事情，眼下正饶有兴趣地做一些一般性的研究，我的心正急切地想探索事物的真相以思考其自身的本质和宇宙的本质。首先想要了解的是陆地及其位置，然后是周边海洋的本质及潮落和海流。接下来还要研究天与地之间那广袤无垠的空间——这离我们最近的空间因着雷鸣电闪、阵风、降雨、降雪、降冰雹而喧嚣。最终，我的心会从较低的地区倏忽而过，冲向凌云顶，一览神奇壮美的景色，意识到自己的永生不朽，它将继续向所有年代延伸，饱览那些已经存在和将要存在的一切。

论心灵之安宁

塞雷努斯①：塞内加，当我审视自己的时候，我的一些不端行为便清晰地浮出表面，使我可以用手触摸；有些藏于较深之处，有些并不总在那里，只是不时往返。我想说，这最后一种是最麻烦的：它们就像潜伏的敌人，一旦时机允许就对你突然袭击，让你既不能像战争年代时刻戒备，也不能像和平年代处之泰然。然而，我大多数时间所处的状态（我为什么不能像对一位医生一样向你承认真相呢?）是我并没有真正摆脱那些自己既怕又恨的恶行，虽然，从另一方面讲，并没有被它们所约束：这倒让我的状态并不太糟，但却极其易怒并且动辄就想与人辩论——我既没生病但也不健康。你没必要说所有的美德开始时都是很脆弱的，随着时间的推移才变得坚实有力。我还知道那些竭力想获得好感的人，如，爬上高职位，获得辩才方面的声誉，以及其他需要被人认可的东西，都需要时间来日趋成熟——那些真正有力量的，和那些为了名声涂脂抹粉将自己掩饰的，两者都需要等待数年，直到时间的流逝能逐渐产生它们的色彩。但是我唯恐那种会使事情变得很牢固的习惯会将这种毛病更深地植根于我身——长期的交往会使人既对美好的也对丑恶的东西产生嗜好。

心理脆弱的本质是在两种选择之间摇摆，没有明显地倾向于对或错。我不能一次就把这一切表示清楚，不如一点一

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① 塞雷努斯是塞内加的一个好朋友，是尼禄时代的一个高级官员，塞内加流传下来的好几封信都是写给他的。

点地讲。我要把发生在我身上的事情告诉你，你就能给我的病症起个名字了。我得承认，我是极爱节俭的。我不喜欢把长椅装饰得那么华丽，也不喜欢把衣服从衣柜里取出，或用重物压上千百遍让它那么光彩耀人，我喜欢家常的、便宜的，收藏和穿上后不必小心翼翼的。我喜欢的饭菜不需要准备，也不需要在家奴的守护下用餐，不用提前几天就预定，也不用好多人伺候着，而是即时买，简单做，不需要跑远路也不需要花高价，而是到处都有的，钱包和身体都能负担得起的，不是怎么吃进又怎么吐出来的。我要的佣人就是普普通通，没什么技能，家养的奴隶就行；我的银器呢，就用乡村老爸用的那种厚重的就行，不需要任何印章；我的桌子不需要有色彩斑斓俗不可耐的标记，也不需因多次辗转于时尚名人之手而为全城所熟知，只要立着能用就行，不要让客人因高兴而分散目光，也不要引起他们的嫉妒。当我立下这些标准，我还是感到自己的心被某个培训佣人的学校的华丽装饰搞得眩惑了，那些奴隶的服装上饰以金品、比要去参加游行还打扮精致，还有一整队光鲜耀人的随从；我被一座房子搞得眩惑了，在那里面你甚至可以在宝石上行走，财富撒在各个角落，房顶闪闪发光，所有的平民百姓都毕恭毕敬地侍候在家庭遗产的废墟上。还需要我提起那清澈见底、水绕着就餐客人流淌的水池，以及那与周围环境相映成辉的宴席吗？长时间节俭惯了，我发现豪华奢靡的壮观场面将我包围，在我周围轰响。我的视觉有些游移，因为我发现用心去面对它，比用眼睛更容易。而这之后我回来，感到不是更糟了而是更悲哀了。行走于我的那些微不足道的财产中，我的头不再抬得那么高，一种隐秘而痛苦的疑惑折磨着我：这样的生活高尚吗？这些都没有改变我，但是却让我感到震撼。

我决定遵循我的老师的教导投身于国家大事，担任一些

公职——当然不是为了那身紫袍和执法官的袍子，而是为了能更好地帮助我的朋友和亲戚，帮助所有的同胞，进而帮助全人类。我满腔热忱地追随芝诺、克里安提斯、克律西波斯，顺便说一下，他们都没有摄职从政，但是都劝导别人那样做。不过当什么东西对我那已不习惯折腾的心发起进攻时，当什么事情发生在我身上时，无论是琐屑小事（每个人生都会经历的）还是难以对付的事，或当一些无关紧要的事要耗费很多精力时，我就会悠闲地躲避，就像疲惫的一群动物，匆匆赶回家。我决定将自己的生活限制在自己的围墙之内，我会说："给我造成损失却不想给予适当回报的人别想从我这儿夺走我一天的时间。让我的心安分守己，滋养自我，心无旁骛——决不仰人鼻息；让它珍惜宁静，远离公私关注。"然而，每当我看到令人心悦诚服的报道并为杰出的典范所激励，我又渴望站出来，为这个人说话，向那个人提供帮助，即便不能成功，也是助人的一种尝试，或去抑制某人因成功而恃才傲物的骄气。

我认为在自己的研究中，这样肯定比较好：专注于自己的课题，演讲时也以此为主题，同时以主题来决定用词，确立一种不矫揉造作的讲演风格。我问："写出传世之作有必要吗？为什么不停止让后代对你歌功颂德的努力？人生来就会死的，无言的葬礼能省却很多麻烦。所以如果你想把时间利用起来，就写一些文风简朴的作品留给自己看，而不是为发表——只为眼下学习就会省力多了。"再者，当我的心气被伟大的思想提高了，它在用词方面就会很有魄力，总是渴望用合适的语言来表达更高的灵感，这样就会产生一种给人很深印象的与主题相配的文风，那样我就忘了自己一贯的自我克制的规定和原则，而被一种已不属于自己的声音带到更高的高度。

咱们长话短说吧，我的善意中存在的这一弱点，还表现在各个方面，我觉得自己正在变坏，或者（这是更令人担忧的）我就像被悬吊在边缘总是命悬一线随时可能要掉下去，而且可能还有更错的地方我自己看不见——我们对自己的性格总是投以太亲密的目光，而偏袒总会影响我们的判断力。我想很多人要是没有想象自己已经很有智慧了，如果他们没有掩饰自己的某些性格，而无视别人的某些性格，那么他们可能就已经获得了智慧。因为你没有理由设想我们的悲哀更多地是由于别人巴结我们，而不是我们巴结自己。谁敢跟自己说出真相？在成群的马屁精的包围中最大的拍马屁者不是自己吗？所以我恳求你，如果你有治疗这种思想游移症的方法，看在我还是值得你施舍的人，给我心灵一个安宁吧，我感到我的这些心理上的不平静不会有什么危险，不会导致狂风暴雨。用一个真实的比喻向你诉说：我不是由于暴风雨而是由于晕船而苦恼。无论是什么病吧，根除掉，来帮帮一个已看到了陆地但仍在挣扎的人吧。

塞内加：确实，塞雷努斯，我一直在悄悄问自己应该把这种心理状态比作什么，我找不到比这些人的状况更相似的了：他们曾长期生病，刚刚大病初愈，但仍常常会感到有点儿发烧或疼痛，而且最近的症状没了却仍会心烦意乱；虽然好多了，有一点发热就把手伸给大夫毫无必要的抱怨。塞雷努斯啊，这些人不是身体没有彻底治愈，而是他们还没有习惯于健康的状态，就好像即便在平静的海面上仍会有层层涟漪，尤其是暴风雨过后刚刚平静下来时。所以你不需要提供什么很彻底的治疗，因为刚刚进行过这样的治疗了——在这儿堵截自己，在那儿跟自己生气，在某个其他地方严正地恐吓自己——而最后阶段的治疗是，树立自信，相信自己的路是对的，不要误入那些纵横交叉于自己路上的歧途，它们让

很多人无可挽回地迷失方向，尽管有人离正确的道路还不远。但是你所期望的是伟大，至高无上，近于神圣的东西——决不动摇。希腊人把这种思想的恒稳坚定称为 euthymia（情感正常），德谟克利特曾就此有过精辟的论述，而我却想称其为 tranquillity（平静），因为没有必要模仿或复制希腊文字的形式——关键是要找到一个术语，它能表达意思，而不是希腊词语的形式。因而，我们探索心灵如何能够保持平稳，恰当地面对自己，乐观地关注自己的处境，不会中断这种快乐，保持平和的状态，没有起伏忐忑：这就是宁静。让我们想想在一般情况下如何做到这些，然后你可以从通用的疗法中选出你喜欢的方法。在此期间，所有的过失必须放到光天化日之下，让每个人都从中看到自己也犯有的错误。同时你会感到自我反感带给你的烦恼远比那些人要少得多，那些人被某些华而不实的宣言束缚，在显赫的头衔下操劳，他们一直虚伪地过日子并非因为自己有此愿望，而是因为自惭形秽。

那些被变化无常、百无聊赖、朝三暮四所折磨的人，与那些怀念过去了的日子，因兴味索然而哈欠连天的人都是同一类人。还有一些人他们像是患了失眠症，四处乱窜，朝秦暮楚，不到精疲力竭不会停歇。他们逐物心移，不断变换生活状况，最终定格下来也并非因为对继续变化的厌倦，而是年事太高对新奇事物已迟钝麻木。还有一些人并非由于心理因素稳定，而是因为惰性十足，缺乏按自己的意愿来改变生活的动力，他们的日子还停留在最初的老样子。其实这种病有无数种特征，但是只有一个结果——对自己不满意。这产生于精神上的不稳定，产生于可怕的、未满足的欲望。当人们不敢或没能得到他们渴望的东西时，他们能抓住的就是渴望。他们总是不平衡，总是躁动不安，结果就不可避免地总是生活在悬而未决的状态之中。他们不择手段拼命想得到自

己渴望的东西，他们说服自己、强迫自己去做不体面的事、难以成功的事，而当一切劳而无功的时候，那种徒劳无益的耻辱又让他们备受折磨，不是为自己的不端行为而是为愿望受挫而懊悔。然后他们不断为已做的尝试悔恨，为再一次尝试而恐惧，心情躁动不安却又苦于无法排解，因为他们既不能控制又无法顺从自己的欲望，生活的不确定性让他们感到前途无望。精神的麻木不仁又让他们在无约束的希望面前止步不前。对劳而无功的憎恶使人们转而变得无所事事，或开始独自研究，而这是向往公共事业、热衷于社会活动、因缺少精神寄托而天性注定不安分的人所无法忍受的，这些使所有的苦恼火上加油。结果，当那些忙碌的人从实际活动中所获得的乐趣消失不见的时候，他们无法忍受待在家里、四面围墙中的孤独寂寥，开始厌恶这种与世隔绝的孤寂。这样又会产生厌世和对自己的不满情绪，产生心绪不宁、郁郁寡欢、难耐闲适而导致的躁动，尤其是当我们羞于承认造成这种状况的原因，这种羞耻感又让痛苦深埋心中，我们的欲望陷于狭窄的制约中，无法逃逸，又无法呼吸，由此又会引发愁思与悲哀以及不安分心灵无尽的踌躇。希望产生时振奋激动，希望破灭时萎靡不振，由此又引发了一些人对自己闲适的憎恶和对无所事事的抱怨以及对别人升迁的极端嫉妒。游手好闲的安逸会衍生怨恨嫉妒，因为他们自己不能发迹就想让别人都遭殃。接下来，这种对别人成功的嫉恨和对自己的失望又使他们迁怒于命运，抱怨生不逢时命途多舛，进而退隐到阴暗角落思忖自己的遭遇，直到对自己产生腻烦和厌倦。由于人的心灵天生就是好动、喜欢搞些活动的，所以它对每个刺激和娱乐都是欢迎的，甚至欢迎那些疲于奔命而洋洋自得、层次不高的人。有些身体上的创伤欢迎有人用手来戳疼它们，渴望有人触摸它们，令人难受的瘙痒希望能被抓挠：同样，

我要说心中的欲望已经破灭就如同可怕的伤痛，只想通过劳碌或病情恶化来获得乐趣。因为确实有些动作会让我们的身体很愉悦，即便能引起疼痛，比如翻个身换到不感到累的那一侧，还会不断换来换去，让身体感到凉快。所以荷马史诗中的阿基里斯①一会儿趴下，一会儿仰面躺着，不断变换姿势，像个病人，哪种姿势都待不长，只能辗转变换来缓解病痛。因此，人们四处旅行，在异国海滩上漫步，在陆地、海洋尝试各种不安分的生活，却总是对周围的东西感到厌恶。“咱们现在去坎帕尼亚。”不久，对奢华的生活厌倦了——“咱们到那些蛮荒地区吧，到布鲁蒂姆和卢卡尼亚的森林看看。”但在野外，他们那看惯奢华的双眼在这些肮脏乏味毫无景致之地感到放松的乐趣也在消失。“咱们到塔林顿吧，那里有著名的港口，温暖的冬天，即便在古代也是人口众多繁华热闹的地区。”“咱们现在还是到城市去吧”——他们的耳朵早就向往鼓掌的喧闹声了，现在他们甚至想看人类杀戮流血。他们一次次地出游，不断变换着景点。正如卢克莱修②所说，“每个人都想以此种方式逃离自我。”但是如果他不能逃出自身，什么时候才是终点呢？他就像是自己的最乏味的伴侣，尾随着自己。所以我们应该意识到我们的难处不在于地点而在于我们自己，我们太脆弱了，不能忍受任何东西，不能忍受劳苦，不能忍受欢乐，不能忍受自己，不能长期忍受任何东西。这一弱点已经把有些人逼得走投无路，因为不断变换

① 指荷马史诗《伊里亚特》中的人物阿基里斯，他因为朋友帕特洛克罗斯的死而痛不欲生，因而辗转反侧，坐立不安。

② 卢克莱修（约前99—前55）古罗马哲学家。他继承古代原子学说，特别阐述并发展了伊壁鸠鲁的哲学观点。他认为物质的存在是永恒的，提出了“无物能由无中生，无物能归于无”的唯物主义观点。著有哲学长诗《物性论》。

目标，他们又回到原来的地方，他们已经没有感到新奇的空间了，他们开始对生活、对世界感到腻烦，自我放纵让他们软弱，又产生了一种“这种同样的事情我还得要忍耐多久”的情绪。

你想知道我建议对这种厌倦的情绪采取的治疗方法吗？正如阿森诺德斯所说的，最好的方法是使自己忙于摄职从政的实际活动。正如有些人愿意在白天进行日光浴、锻炼和其他保健活动，对于运动员来说最切实、最重要的事情就是把大部分时间花在增强四肢力量上，对此他们是全力以赴的，所以对于你这样需要培训心智应对公共生活中的竞争的人，到目前为止最好的办法就是定期实践。当一个人打算使自己对公民和同胞有用，如果他能全身心地投入到为公众和个人服务中去，他就是同时在训练自己并做好事。“但是，”阿森诺德斯①说，“由于人类如此疯狂、野心勃勃，太多的陷害诬告颠倒黑白，使诚实正直的人处境危险，屡受阻挠而得不到帮助，所以我们确实应该从公共生活和政治生活中隐退，不过一个伟大的思想即便是在私人生活中也还是有机会自由地活动。狮子和其他动物的能量可以被笼子限制住，而人的能量不会，人最伟大的成就往往在退隐之后才能看到。然而，如果一个人无论悠闲地隐居何处，他都能用自己的智慧、言辞和忠告来为个人和人类服务，那么就让他让自己隐居起来吧。为国家服务不止限于那些竞争公职的候选人，法庭上的辩护人，为战争与和平而投票的人。教育年轻人，向他们心中灌输美德的人（出色的教师异常匮乏），还有那遏制、制止人们疯狂追逐财富和奢靡，即使制止不了，至少也能拖延他

① 阿森诺德斯是奥古斯都的老师，任其军师二十九年，斯多葛派哲学家。

们步伐的人——这样的人也是在为公众服务，尽管他过的是私人生活。那些处理外国人与本国人之间的案子，向起诉人宣布财产评估人的裁决结果的执政官，和宣讲正义、虔诚、忍耐、勇敢、蔑视死亡、有关诸神的知识、宣讲发自善良之心的祝福是多么自由等问题的本质的人相比，你觉得前者比后者对社会更有益吗？所以如果你从履行公共责任中抽出时间用来研究，你就不算放弃或逃避工作。因为不仅站在前线防御左右两翼的是士兵，守护大门和保卫兵工厂这样虽不是很危险但也不可掉以轻心的岗位，尽管不流血，也是军事职责。如果你致力于研究，你就不会再厌倦生活，不会因厌恶白天而渴望夜晚，你就会感到你既不是自己的负担，对他人也不是无用的，你将吸引很多人成为你的朋友，很多优秀人物会聚集在你的周围。即便是最不起眼的美德也不可能永远隐身，而总会清楚地表露出来：任何值得拥有这种美德的都会寻到她的踪迹。但是如果我们脱离整个社会，远离人群，只为自己活着，这种没有任何趣味的与世隔绝的生活就会引来毫无价值的活动。我们会开始盖一些房子，推倒另一些，拦截海水，再从人工渠道取水，把自然赋予我们利用的时间挥霍掉。我们中有些人能够非常节俭地利用时间，而另一些人却浪费它；有些人可以开出时间账户，另一些人就没有任何结余——这真是最可耻的结局。老年人往往除了年龄再无其他证据证明自己长寿了。”

亲爱的塞雷努斯，我觉得阿森诺德斯太轻易就顺应时代了，太迅速地退隐了。我不否认人有时确实应该让步——但是，应该一点儿一点儿逐渐隐退，应该坚持我们的标准，保持我们战斗者的荣誉。那些与敌人达成协议时并未解除武装的军人更安全，更受人敬重。我想，这是美德及其追求美德者应该做的：如果命运将某人击败，剥夺了他行动的手段，

他不应该转身就走，扔下武器找个地方躲起来（好像真有命运找不到的地方似的），而是应该更慎重地履行职责，谨慎地寻找能够为国家服务的机会。假如不能成为战士，就担任公职；假如他要以平民身份生活，就让他当个辩护人；假如情况迫使他保持沉默，就让他以无言的方式帮助他的同胞；假如他在讲坛上露面有危险，就让他在私人住处、演出中、宴会上当个好的伴侣、忠诚的朋友、温文尔雅的赴宴者。假如他没有了一个公民的责任，就让他履行做人的责任。如果我们精神崇高，就不会将自己禁锢在一城之内，我们应走出去与整个地球打交道，把整个世界当成自己的国家，为此，我们就可以让自己的德行在更广阔的领域发挥作用。假设你被禁止在法院工作、在公众场合讲演、参加选举，那么想想身后向你开放的大片地区和欢迎你的各国人民吧——你永远也不会发现对你禁入的领域比向你开放的领域更广大。但是当心不要让这全都成了你的错——如，除了当执政官、议长、传令官或萨菲斯①，你不想担任别的官职。但是假如除了当将军或司令官否则你就不想在军队服务呢？即便其他人担当最高级别的官职，而命运让你就当个三等兵，那么你必须用声音、你的鼓动、你的示范、你的精神来承担士兵的责任。如果一个人手被砍下，他还能发现自己可以毅然挺立履行自己的职责为他人助威。你也应该像他这样做：如果命运免去了你在公共事业中的显要职位，你也要坚定地挺住，鼓励其他人的工作；而如果有人扼住你的喉咙，你要继续挺立，一声不响地助他人一臂之力。一个好公民的服务从来就不会没有作用：人们可以听到，可以看到，他通过表情、点头、缄口不语，甚至步态提供帮助。就如一些有益健康的食品，即

① 迦太基政府的一个高级职位。

便没有品尝，不用触摸，仅从它们散发出的味道我们就能受益，美德即使藏身于很远的地方也能显露其优点。无论她是出国办理正当业务，或经默许露面，或被迫卷起船帆，无论她是被禁锢的、静止不动的，还是一言不发的，是局限在狭小空间里，还是显而易见的，在任何条件下她都能够有所帮助。你为什么认为一个体面退休了的人就不能做有价值的榜样？如果由于时运不济或国家状况不允许，不能将全部精力投入于一种生活，那么最理想的就是就是将休闲与某种活动结合，因为你总会找到一条途径参与某种高尚的活动。

当三十僭主将雅典搞得四分五裂的时候，你见过比那更糟糕的城市吗？他们杀死了1300个最优秀的公民还不罢休，十足的野性刺激他们继续倒行逆施。这个城市设有亚略巴古——最神圣的高级法院，和元老院，以及与元老院同级别的公民大会，每天一伙邪恶的刽子手聚集在这里，而不幸的元老院议厅中集聚着众位僭主。一个国家如果僭主与侍从的人数相差无几了，这样的国家还能太平吗？连恢复自由的希望都很渺茫，更没有合适的机会处置这些掌有实权的恶棍。这可怜的国家到哪儿找足够多的像哈默迪乌斯①这样的人呢？而苏格拉底深陷这场激战中，他安慰郁闷沮丧的元老，鼓励那些对国家绝望的人，谴责那些为自己财富担惊受怕的富豪，这些人为当初不顾死活的贪婪感到悔之晚矣，而对于那些乐意效仿他的人来说，他是活生生的鼓励，是三十僭主身边自由的灵魂。然而，就是这个人被雅典亲手处死于深牢大狱，自由之神不能容忍曾公开嘲弄一群暴君的人享有自由。所以你能明白这两点了：在一个灾难深重的国度，智者有机会显

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① 哈默迪乌斯曾与阿里斯托杰顿一起带头推翻雅典的僭主佩西司特拉提达伊。

示其影响力；而在一个繁荣昌盛的国家，不择手段地攫钱、嫉妒，及上千种卑怯的恶行会大行其道。因而，我们应该按照国家的安排和命运所赋予我们的自由，扩展或缩小我们的活动，但是无论如何我们应该振奋精神不要陷于恐惧之中萎靡不振。尽管受到来自四面八方的威胁，尽管武器、镣铐的哗啦声不绝于耳，他的勇气丝毫不减也绝不会收敛，这样的人才是真正的男子汉。因为自我保护并非意味着要压抑自我。确实，我相信，库里乌斯·丹塔图斯曾说过他宁可真的去死，也不愿意像具行尸走肉似地活着，因为最可怕的事情莫过于死前只留下活过的岁数。但是如果你恰巧活在一个为国效力非常不易的时代，你就要把时间更多用地用于休闲和文学作品，就像在惊险的航海中不时寻找一个安全的港湾，不要让公共生活先放逐了你，而要先主动摆脱出来。

无论如何，我们必须先要谨慎地审视自己，其次要审视我们想要参与的活动，然后弄明白为了谁、和谁一起进行这些活动。

这其中最重要的就是要正确地评价自己，因为我们总是过高估计自己的能力。某人因对自己的口才太自信而受到伤害；某人因对命运奢求太多超过了它的承受能力；某人超负荷工作使羸弱的身体不堪重负。有的人太羞涩而不适于搞政治，因为搞政治需要大胆地抛头露面；有的人总是率性而为所以不适于司法工作；有的人不能抑制怒火中烧和其他不快情绪以至于出言不逊；有的人不能控制自己的才智，抑制那些机巧却危险的进攻。对于所有这些人，退隐较之公共活动更适于他们——易怒易躁的性格要避免刺激，直言不讳会引出麻烦。

其次，我们必须评估正在做的实事，使自己的力量足以承担起这项工作。执行任务的人永远要比任务本身更强势

——负荷太重就会将负重的人压垮。此外，某些任务与其说是伟大，不如说会衍生出很多其他的任务。我们必须避免那些将会产生各种新花样的次生活动，不要染指那些一旦触及就很难抽身的事情。你要去做那些自己可以完成或至少是希望完成的任务，而回避那些在进行过程中会变得越来越多、想停也停不下来的工作。

在对人的选择上，我们也必须非常审慎，必须确定他们是否值得我们为其贡献生命的一部分，牺牲我们的时间是否能使其有所变化。因为有些人确实会以怨报德。阿森诺德斯说他不会陪一个不知心怀感激的人一起进餐。我想你能理解，他更不喜欢拜访那些以一顿饭来报答朋友相助的人，这些人把一道道菜看做是慷慨的给予，好像他们给他的荣耀超过了给与别人的。没有人见证和观看，私下里大快朵颐也是了无生趣的。

你必须了解你的性格更适合实际的活动还是安静的研究与思考，向适合你天生的才能与禀赋的方向发展。伊索克拉底①强行将埃弗罗斯②从广场拉走，因为他认为埃弗罗斯更适合去撰写历史。强其所难，天性便不能充分发挥；与自然作对，我们便会徒劳无功。

但是没有比深厚、诚挚的友谊更令人欣喜的了。有人随时乐意倾听你毫无顾忌地倾诉心中秘密，是多么幸福的事情！和他们分享你的所知，你会觉得比个人独享还轻松，和他们叙谈能够抚平你心中的苦闷，他们的忠告促使你作出决定，他们的欢乐化解了你的忧愁，他们只要一露面就会让你高兴！诚然，我们要选择那些最大限度地摆脱了很强欲望的人，因

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① 伊索克拉底是古代雅典著名的演说家、教师和修辞学家。

② 埃弗罗斯是公元前4世纪著名的历史学家。

为恶行都是不露声色地散布的，和近在咫尺的恶人接触我们也会遭到攻击和侵害。这正如传染病流行时我们必须小心不要坐在已经出现发烧症状的病人旁边，因为这样对我们是危险的，他们冲着我们呼吸会使我们染病。所以在选择朋友时，我们要谨慎选择那些人品没有问题的。健康的人和有病的人混杂在一起，是传播疾病的开始。但是我并不是让你只追随智者，并与他们联系。我们到哪儿才能找到那位我们已苦寻良久的智者？理想情况下我们只能在坏人里挑最不坏的。如果你能在柏拉图们、色诺芬们或苏格拉底的其他门徒中寻找好人，或者如果你可以进入加图时代，那个时代产生了不愧为加图时代的人（还产生了很多有史以来最邪恶的人，这些人犯有骇人听闻的罪行：加图对这两种人都有必要赏识一番，他需要好人来赢得他们的首肯，也需要那些坏蛋来证明自己的力量），那就再好不过了。但在当下好人稀缺的时候你在选择时不能太挑剔。还有，你要特别注意别选那些阴郁伤感的人，这种人找个茬儿就发牢骚，虽然人毫无疑问是忠诚善良的，但是如果身边有个人对每件事情都焦虑不安，动不动就哼哼唧唧发牢骚，就会对你平和的心境产生破坏。

让我们再来谈谈私有财产这一人类痛苦的最大根源。如果将我们所遭受的其他苦难，如死亡、疾病、恐惧、欲望、对痛苦与艰辛的忍受，与金钱所带来的罪恶相比较，后者要严重得多。所以我们必须记住没有钱要比有了钱又失掉的痛苦轻得多，而且我们应该认识到可以失去的东西越少，给我们带来的痛苦就越小。如果你认为富人更能忍受痛苦你就错了，最高大和最矮小的躯体伤口是一样痛的。比翁对此作了一个恰当的比喻：从一个秃顶上拔头发和从长满头发的头上拔都是一样疼。你可以得出同样的结论，即富人和穷人会感到同样的痛苦，不管贫富，都把钱看得很紧，一旦钱被攫走，

都会痛苦。但是，正如我所说的，原本就没有钱财比得而复失所造成的痛苦更容易忍受，也更简单，所以你会发现那些命运女神从未示爱的人比被她抛弃的人要快活得多。灵魂高尚的第欧根尼①因为认识到这点，所以他把一切安排好，从他那里什么东西都拿不走。你可以称这种状况为贫穷、匮乏、亟需，给这种无忧无虑的自由起个任何难听的名字。只有他没有什么可以失去，否则我不会说他是幸福的。如果我没弄错的话，置身吝啬鬼、骗子、抢劫犯、绑匪这些人中而不受其害，这样的地位堪比帝王。如果有人怀疑第欧根尼的快活，他也同样会对不朽诸神的状况产生质疑——他们是否因为没有房产、公园、出租给外籍佃户的昂贵的农庄，从市场得不到巨额生息的进项而生活得不愉快。你们这些被财富击垮的人，你们不感到羞愧吗？来，看看天空，你会看到财产全无的众神，尽管一无所有却能贡献一切。一个人抛弃了命运的恩赐，你认为他贫穷，还是类似于不朽的神？德米特里厄斯是庞培的释奴，并不因为比庞培富有就感到羞愧，你说他就因而感到更幸福吗？他曾每天给奴隶记数，就像一位将军检阅自己的军队，而之前，他会认为有两个下等奴隶和稍宽敞一些的小屋就是富有了。当有人告诉第欧根尼说他唯一的奴隶逃跑了，他觉得不值得把他找回来。“如果曼斯没有第欧根尼可以活，而第欧根尼没有曼斯就活不下去，那是很可耻的。”他说。我想他的意思是：“管好自己的事吧，命运之神，第欧根尼现在没有属于你的东西了。我的奴隶跑了——不，

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① 第欧根尼（公元前 404 – 公元前 323）出生于一个银行家家庭，是古希腊犬儒学派哲学家。他认为除了自然的需要必须满足外，其他的任何东西，都是不自然的。他强调禁欲主义的自我满足，鼓励放弃舒适环境。作为一个苦行主义的身体力行者，他居住在一只木桶内，过着乞丐一样的生活。

是我解脱了，获得了自由。”一家子的奴隶需要穿衣、吃饭，这么多贪吃的家伙要填饱肚子，要给他们买衣服，还得提防他们偷偷摸摸，接受他们边哭边骂的服务，人如果不欠任何人任何东西，除了一个他可以轻易就拒绝的人——他自己，这样的人是多么幸福！但是，由于我们没有这样的意志力，所以我们至少得缩减自己的财产，以尽可能少地遭受命运的打击。战争中，那些能将身体全都缩进盔甲里的人要比盔甲遮拦不住而使身体暴露在外容易受伤的人更适合打仗。所以钱的最理想的数额应是既不低于贫困线也不要超出太多。

而且，如果我们以前就很节俭，就会满足于这样的限度，不力行节俭，多少财富都不够用，多少财富都不算富足，尤其是补救的方法近在咫尺，贫穷本身可以通过节俭变得富有。让我们习惯于戒除浮夸的生活方式，以功能性质来考量事物，而不是炫耀作秀。让食物来解饿，饮水来解渴，性生活满足需要，让我们学着依靠自己的四肢，懂得调整我们的穿着风格和生活方式，不要一味追求时髦，而要承袭我们祖先的风俗习惯。让我们学会提高自我约束力，戒除奢靡之风，不要好高骛远，不要动辄生气，不要对贫困抱有成见，要勤俭节约，即便很多人羞于如此，我们也要按照自然的需要采取廉价可行的补救方法，遏制自己放纵的希求和对未来着迷的心灵，好像给它戴上脚镣，立志自力更生获取财富而不是靠运气。如此这般并非人生各种各样不应有的灾祸就可全部免除，暴风雨就不会频繁袭击那些勇敢扬帆远航的人。我们必须约束自己的活动，这样命运的武器就找不到攻击的目标，因此流放和灾难就会变害为利，更重大的灾祸就会被比较小的不幸所弥补。当心灵不肯接受教诲，不能用温和的方法治疗，为什么不能服一剂贫困，或耻辱，或一般性损伤的药，采取以毒攻毒的方法？所以让我们习惯于在没有大群人的簇拥下

用餐，使唤少一些奴隶，适当购置服装，再限制一下住房面积。不仅是在赛跑和马戏场的竞赛中，而且在人生的赛程中，都要沿着跑道的内圈跑。

即便我们的学习也是这样，虽然学习上的支出是最值得的，但支出的正当与否取决于是否适度。拥有无数本书有什么意义呢？书的主人一生几乎连题目都没有看过。没有得到书的指导，大量的书就成了学习之人的负担，而且专注于几位作家比迷失于众多作者要有益得多。四万册图书在亚历山大的图书馆①火灾中化为灰烬，外人曾盛赞其为王室财富的豪华见证，如提图斯·李维②称其为国王高雅品味和奉献精神的卓越成就。这根本不是高雅品味和奉献精神，而是学究

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① 位于埃及亚历山大里亚城，是最著名的古代图书馆。它始建于公元前259年，由埃及的托勒密王朝相继建立与管理。据说当初建亚历山大图书馆唯一的目的就是“收集全世界的书”，实现“世界知识总汇”的梦想。据说当时尽管有战乱，亚历山大图书馆仍藏书约5.4万卷。极盛时据说馆藏各类手稿逾50万卷（纸草卷）。不少历史名人都曾出任过亚历山大图书馆的馆长，很多圣贤也均在此讲学或求学，使图书馆享有“世界上最好的学校”的美名，并在整个地中海世界传播文明长达200至800年。传说它先后毁于两场大火。现在的亚历山大图书馆是1995年后重建的，占地4万平方米，它不仅是埃及的重点建筑项目，也是联合国教科文组织在世界范围内的重大科研和建筑项目。

② 提图斯·李维（前59年—17年），古罗马历史学家。生于意大利北部的帕塔维乌姆（今帕多瓦）。他学习了文学、史学、修辞学、演说术等，是罗马共和后期学问渊博、几乎无所不知的大学问家。后李维奉命教授屋大维的继孙克劳狄，即后来的皇帝。李维著述丰富，但流传下来的只有《罗马自建城以来的历史》一书。他用40年左右时间写成的这部罗马史巨著，共142卷，记述自传说中的埃涅阿斯到达意大利至公元前9年的史事，著作中保存了丰富和宝贵的历史资料，不失为研究罗马早期及罗马共和国历史的重要文献。

气的自我放纵——其实，也谈不上学究气，因为他们收集书不是为了学识，而是为了炫耀。同样你能发现很多人连最基本的文化都没有，他们藏书不是用作学习的工具而是为了装点自家的餐厅。所以我们应该买够用的书来读，而不要买来装饰门面。“不过，”你会说，“这总比把钱浪费在买科林斯式青铜器或画儿上体面多了。”但是在任何领域的过度消费都是应该受到谴责的。你怎么能容忍这样的人，他收集香橼木和象牙的书柜，收藏了不知名的或三流作家的作品，然后就坐在他那几千本书中，打着哈欠，更多地是为书的封面和标签感到得意？于是，你就会看到最无所事事的人竟拥有好多套演讲词和历史书籍，装书的板条箱一直摞到天花板——如今精美的藏书室也和冷热浴室一样成了家中必不可少的装饰物。当然我可以原谅那些人由于酷爱学习而犯的错，但是这些贤哲的著作及其多幅画像收集起来仅仅就为装点一堵墙以显示自命不凡呀。

不过你也许在生活中陷入了某种困难的境地，公务或私事在你神不知鬼不觉时就收紧了绳套，使你既不能解开又不能弄断。想想带着脚镣的囚徒只是在最开始的时候感到腿上的镣铐的重量，当他们决定放弃挣扎强忍下去时，他们就从事情的必然性中学到了要以坚韧的精神来忍受，而且习与性成，逐渐学会了要以放松的态度来忍受。如果你有藐视困难的精神，不为困难所烦扰，那么在任何生活状况中，你都可以找到乐趣、消遣和快活。没有比这方面更让我们应该感谢自然了，由于了解我们生于何种苦难之中，她为人类设计了在灾祸面前可以得到慰藉的习性，以使人类可以尽快在最恶劣的祸事面前泰然处之。如果灾祸以一成不变的力度持续向我们进攻，那么没有人能够忍受长久的不幸。我们都被命运所束缚，有些人是被较松的金锁链所束缚，而另些人则被较

紧的劣质金属锁链所束缚，但是这又有什么关系呢？我们都被禁锢着，那些束缚着别人的人，自己也被束缚着——除非你也许能感觉左手的锁链轻一些①。有的人被高官束缚，有的人被财富束缚；高贵的出身压倒一些人，卑贱的出身又压倒另一些人；有些人屈从于别人的管制，另一些人屈从于自己的管制；有的人因为被流放而限居于一处，另一些人则因为履行神职而不得不住在某个地方：所有的生活都是苦役。所以你要习惯自己的环境，尽可能不要抱怨，尽可能弄清它们带给你的只要思想稳定，总能在逆境中找到安慰。如果规划巧妙，即使很小的面积也能分成具有多种用途的空间；倘若安排合理，狭小的地块也能居住。想出战胜困难的办法，条件艰苦的可以改善，条件有限的可以拓宽，负担太重如果知道如何承担便可减轻。此外，我们绝对不能好高骛远，而是应该探究那些触手可及的东西，因为欲望不能被完全控制。放弃那些不可能或很难得到的东西，努力获取那些容易得到的和极想得到的，而且要认识到所有东西都是微不足道的，表面上不同，内里全都一样无用。不要羡慕那些比自己地位高的人，高高耸立的是悬崖绝壁。另一方面，被命运不公平地置于危险境地的人倒反而安全，因为那种状况有利于他们戒骄戒躁处事低调。确实有很多人被迫固守于高端，如果不是自己坠落，他们不会下来，但是他们必须要承受这样的事实：他们不得已成为别人的负担，这本身就是最大的负担，而且他们并不是上升到那样的高度，而是被钉到了高处。让这些人以公正、温和、善良、慷慨作为安全措施来抵御今后的灾难，并寄希望于更安全的处境吧。但是将我们从精神游移不定的状态中拯救出来的最有效的方法是对前面的历程设

① 指监守吏，他们有时押解犯人时需要将犯人铐在自己左手上。

置一些限制。当需要停止时，不要让命运来作决定，而应由我们自己早早决定罢手不干。这样，当我们的心灵被欲望刺激时，就会被限制住，就不会将我们引入无法控制的偏离境地。

我所讲的这些适合那些有缺点的、普通的、不健全的人，而不是智者。智者不必神色紧张、小心翼翼地走动，因为他能很自信地毫不犹豫地对抗命运，而且决不妥协。他没有理由惧怕她，因为他不仅将他的东西、财产和地位，而且甚至连他的身体，他的眼睛和手，以及那些使生命更珍贵的东西，还有他本身，都看成是默许给他的。他活着就如同他是有人出借给他的，必定要按要求偿还的，没什么可抱怨的。他并没有因此在他自己眼中变得廉价，因为他知道他不是自己的，但是他会在做所有事情时都小心谨慎，就像一个虔诚圣洁的人守卫着托付给他的东西一样。而无论何时命令他偿还债务，他都不会抱怨命运，而会说："我为自己所持有和保留的一切而感谢你。我照看了你的财产获取了巨大利益，但是应你的要求，我怀着感激的心情和良好的意愿交给你。如果你想让我仍旧拥有你的任何东西，我会妥善保存，如果你不同意我保有这些东西，我会把银币、银盘、房子、我的家全都还给你。"如果自然要求将她原先托付给我们的东西归还，我们会对她说："把我的灵魂收回吧，它现在比当初你赋予我时好得多，我不会推托，不会退缩，我很高兴你把我意识到之前给我的东西都拿走——拿走吧。"回到你来的地方有什么害处吗？如果不能正确对待死亡，就会活得一团糟，所以我们必须首先摒弃我们在这件事上所确立的价值观，把生命的气息看做一种廉价的东西。用西塞罗的话说，我们厌恶那些不惜一切手段急于保住自己生命的角斗士，我们也赏识那些公开藐视生命的角斗士。你要知道同样的事也适合我们：死亡的

原因往往是因为惧怕死亡。命运女神戏弄我们说，“为什么我要让你们这些胆怯的贱民活着。既然你们不知道怎么把喉咙伸出来，就让你们尝尝更厉害的创伤和刀刺的滋味。但是如果你们能勇敢地面对刀锋，没有缩脖，没有用手挡，那么你们将活得更长，死得更安逸。”那些惧怕死亡的人永远不会做一个活人值得做的事。但是知道这是在自己孕育母腹那一刻就设定好的条件的人，将依这些条款生活，同时他将以同样心灵的力量来保证任何事都不会令其感到意外吃惊。他把可能发生的都看成将要发生的，他能减轻那些麻烦的杀伤力，那些有所准备拭目以待的人不会对它们感到惊讶，但它们对那些疏忽大意、期望一切都会顺利的人却是沉重打击。疾病、坐牢、灾害、火灾，所有这些都是可以预知的——我不知道自然将我归于哪个烦扰的行列。有那么多回邻居哀悼死去的亲人，那么多回人们手举火把和蜡烛为早逝的亲人举行葬礼，他们的队伍从我们家门口走过。建筑物倒塌的轰隆声时常在我的耳边回响。很多在广场、元老院和通过聊天与我建立了联系的人一夜之间溘然长逝，将友谊之手撒开。这些时时在我周围游荡的险情如果某一天降临到我头上，会让我惊慌失措吗？有多少人计划海上远航却没有考虑到会有暴风雨的袭击！我从来没觉得从一个蹩脚作者的著作中引用一句经典的句子有什么不体面的。只要普布利柳斯①不写荒唐的笑剧，也不考虑低层观众，他所显示的智慧远远超过悲喜剧的作家们，他作品中的很多思想光芒远比那些悲剧作者的更耀眼，更别说滑稽剧了，其中包括这句：“发生在一个人身上的事情也可以发生在所有人身上。”如果你让此意沦肌浃髓，而且将别人的灾难（每天都会有大量不幸事情发生）看做有一条清

① 普布利柳斯·西鲁斯（公元前42－公元前1年）古罗马作家。

晰的路径也通向你，你就会在灾祸袭击前早早装备防御好。当危险已至，才开始武装自己的思想来对抗它就为时太晚了。“我觉得不会发生这样的事呀?”“你曾想到竟然会是这样的吗?”为什么不会呢？有哪些财富身后没跟着贫穷、饥饿和乞讨？什么官职的紫袍上、占卜官的器物上、贵族们的鞋带上没有沾染污点、耻辱的烙印、上千个不检点和令人不齿的痕迹？哪个王权没有面临过毁灭、垮台、僭主和刽子手？而且这些事相隔不久就会发生：威坐于王位之上与匍匐于另一王位之前只是转瞬之间。那么就要明白每种情况都会变，发生在任何人身上的事也能发生在你身上。你富有，难道你比庞培还富有？但是当盖乌斯——他原来的亲戚、现在的主子向他打开凯撒的大门以使他能关上他自己时，他甚至连面包和水都没有。虽然庞培拥有那么多源头和河口都在他领地之内的河流，但现在他却要为几滴水而折腰。他又饿又渴最后死于一个亲戚的宫殿里，而就在他忍饥挨饿之际，他的继承人却在为他安排国葬。你曾位居高官，但你的职位有塞扬努斯①的高，有他那么难以企及，有他那么无所不有吗？然而，就在元老院将他送入监狱的同一天，人们把他撕成碎片，就是这个曾经将诸神与人类所能赋予的一切财富集于一己之身的人，刽子手竟找不到能拖走的尸首。你是国王，我不想对你说库罗伊索斯②，那个活着目睹了要火葬自己的柴堆被点燃又熄灭的王者，他不仅在国家灭亡后，而且在自己死过一

① 塞扬努斯曾为执政官，他在一次元老院的会议上被押解到监狱，并在同一天被处决。

② 吕底亚国王库罗伊索斯被波斯王打败，即将遭到火焚处死时，他流泪高呼索伦之名，波斯王问明情况，了解了索伦的警语，动了慈悲之心，免他一死。

次后还保留了一条命。我也不想对你说朱古达①，他曾令罗马人闻风丧胆，但是不到一年就被缚到罗马人面前示众。我们曾目睹非洲国王托勒密②和亚美尼亚国王米特里达特③被盖乌斯投进监狱，其中一人被流放，另一位更诚心诚意地祈望去流放。在这接连的天翻地覆的事件中，除非你认为能发生的必定会发生，否则你会屈服于灾难的压力之下，这灾难会让首次目睹的人崩溃。

下一个问题是确保我们不要毫无意义地浪费自己的精力，或者说不要做无意义的事，就是说不要希求我们无法得到的东西，或不要希求那些一旦得到就会让我们感觉不值得为之花费很多时间很大力气的愿望。换句话说，我们不能徒劳无益、劳而无功，也不能事倍功半，一般来说如果我们不能取胜或者对获胜的过程感到愧疚，那么痛苦就会接踵而至。我们必须戒除那种东奔西跑好凑热闹的浮躁风气，很多人热衷于这样的生活，他们聚集在宅邸、剧院或讲坛的周围，好管别人的闲事，总是给人一种忙忙碌碌的印象。如果其中一位从房子出来，你可以问他："你要去哪儿？你想什么呢？"他会回答："我真的不知道，不过我要见一些人，我要做一些事。"他们四处游荡，漫无目的地找事干，不是做想要做的事而是碰到什么做什么。他们百无聊赖毫无目的地闲逛，就像

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① 努米底亚国王朱古达从公元前 111 到前 105 年与古代罗马长期战争。努米底亚拥有精锐骑兵，而罗马军队士气涣散，连遭失败。前 107 年，马略当选为执政官，受权指挥北非作战，接连获胜。朱古达陷入困境，退至邻国毛里塔尼亚避难。前 105 年，毛里塔尼亚国王把朱古达引渡给罗马军副，马略凯旋罗马。翌年，朱古达死于狱中，努米底亚被分割。

② 托勒密是毛里塔尼亚的国王，被流放到罗马处死。

③ 亚美尼亚国王米特里达特后来重新登上王位。

蚂蚁爬到灌木丛上，漫无目的地一直爬到树枝的最上端，然后又原路返回爬下来。很多人过着和这些动物一样的生活，将其称为无事忙绝非不公。当你看到那些人匆匆忙忙擦身而过像是去救火，就会不免心生遗憾，他们常常会在路上迎头撞到别人，不是自己就是对方摔个仰八叉，这时他们往往都是去匆忙拜访某个从不会回访的人，或是去参加某个根本就不认识的人的葬礼，或去旁听某个不断惹官司的人的庭审，要么就去参加一个结过多次婚的女人的订婚仪式，照看一下轿子，有时甚至抬着它。然后他们回家，筋疲力尽，不知目的何在，诅咒说他们不知道为什么要往外跑，跑到哪儿去了——而第二天他们故态复萌，继续闲逛游荡。所以，要让所有的活动都在某一目标指引下进行，让其目的清晰可见。并非那些活动让人们焦躁不安，而是事情虚假的表象让人们发狂，因为连狂人也需要希望来刺激他们，而某些东西的外表对他们会产生刺激，因为他们被蒙蔽的心识别不出那些毫无价值的事情。那些闲逛的人不断扩充着这一群体，他们中的每个人都以同样方式以各种空虚琐屑的理由在城市转悠。天一亮，他没事可做，就往外走，在很多人家的大门口碰了钉子，只在和通报来客的奴仆打了个招呼就被关在了门外，这时他才发现没有谁比他本人更难在家中找到的了。这种劣行又引发另一种最可鄙的恶习：偷听打探公开的和秘密的消息，了解那些讲出去和听起来都不靠谱的事情。

我猜德谟克利特一定是注意到这种现象才开始这样说的："任何人如果想过安静日子就不要参与很多活动，无论是公共的还是私人的活动。"——他说的当然是指无意义的活动。如果是必要的活动，那么不仅是很多，而且是无数的公事或私事都得要做。但是如果没有义务和责任需要我们去做，我们最好克制自己。因为一个人如果要干很多事，往往就会将自

己置于命运的掌控下，而最安全的方针是少去引起她的注意，虽然还要时时把她记挂在心，却任何事情都不能相信她。于是会有人说："我要出航，除非有什么事发生"，"我要当执政官，除非有什么事阻止我"，"我的生意要成功了，除非有什么干扰。"这就是为什么我们说智者身上不会发生违背其期望的事情。并不是说，发生在所有人身上的概率不会发生在他身上，而是说他不会在概率上犯错误。事情的结果未必如他所愿，但他可以估计得到——而首先他应该估计到会有什么事妨碍他实现自己的计划。如果没有许诺必然会成功，那么热望变失望所产生的烦恼肯定就容易对付了。

我们还应该让自己通权达变，这样就不会过分寄希望于制订好的计划上，而可以转移到有机会可以做成的事情上，不必对目的或条件发生变化感到恐惧，假定变化无常这种最不利于心态平和的不利因素无法掌控我们。固执己见常常会让命运勒索某些东西，因而一定会带来不幸和焦虑，而更严重的是反复无常，这是任何地方都无法抑制的。这两方面都是心态平和的大敌，而且你会发现既不能改变，也不能忍耐。任何情况下都必须将心灵从外部召唤到本身：它必须信任自己，自得其乐，自我欣赏，必须尽可能多地从别人的事情中抽身，关注自身，不要患得患失，即便是灾祸，也要仁心相待。一次，海难消息传来，芝诺，我们斯多葛派的创始人，听说他所有的财产都沉到海里后说："命运让我做一个少有拖累的哲人。"当一个暴君威胁要杀死哲学家色俄多鲁斯并且真的要让他暴尸街头时，他回答："只要你高兴，我的半品脱的血由你处置，至于说埋葬，如果你觉得我在地上还是在地下腐烂对我来说很重要，你就太愚蠢了。"尤里乌斯·卡那

斯①，一个杰出的优秀人士，即使他出生在我们这个时代，我们也非常钦佩他，他与盖乌斯进行了长时间的争论，当他要离开时，那个法拉里斯②对他说："为了让你不再为自己愚蠢的希望所迷惑，我已命令将你带走处决。"他的回答是："我谢谢你，高贵的君主。"我不能确定他这话什么意思，我可以想出几种可能。他的意思是说对方的残忍已经使死亡成了祝福，以此来侮辱对方吗？他是嘲弄对方每天都发疯（因为那些孩子被杀、财产被没收的人一向都得向他表示感谢）吗？他是把对他的宣判当成乐于接受的解脱吗？无论他是什么意思，都是勇敢无畏的应答。有些人会说："这之后盖乌斯可能会命令让他活下来。"卡那斯不惧那些，众所周知，下达此类命令之后，盖乌斯从来都不食言的。你相信卡那斯在行刑前的十天里过得无忧无虑吗？这个人的所说、所做简直令人难以置信，他保持得多么平静。当拉着一队死刑犯的百夫长命令他也站出来时，他正在下国际跳棋。听到叫他，他数了数棋子对他的棋友说："听着，我死了以后你不许谎称自己赢了。"然后对百夫长点点头说："你得作证，我多赢了一个棋子。"你以为卡那斯只是享受棋盘上的游戏吗？他是享受这场充满讽刺意味的游戏。他的朋友为将要失去这样一个人而感到伤心，而他却对他们说："你们为什么悲伤？你们还弄不明白灵魂为什么不朽，而我很快就知道了。"他直到死都没有停止探索真理，使自己的死成为人们讨论的话题。他的哲学导师和他在一起，当他们离着我们高高在上的凯撒每天接受

① 尤里乌斯·卡那斯是斯多葛派哲学家，被暴君卡里古拉处死。

② 法拉里斯是公元前6世纪西西里岛上的暴君。最臭名昭著的是他叫工匠制作了一头铜牛，将犯人关进牛肚子，然后用火烧，被关在里面的人的惨叫声可以通过缚在牛鼻子上的长笛传出来，长笛可以将惨叫声转化为音乐。

贡品的土丘不远的时候，他说："卡那斯，你现在在想什么呢？你感觉如何？"卡那斯回答："我决定做笔记，记录一下瞬间之内灵魂是否意识到自己离开了身躯。"他还许诺说，如果有什么发现他会依次拜访他的朋友们，向他们透露灵魂的状况。看看在飓风中的平静吧，这样的灵魂是值得不朽的，以自己的命运来证明真相，在生命的最后时刻还盘问即将离去的灵魂，不仅到死都在探索研究，而且从死亡的经历本身来探究，没有人对哲学的探究比这更长久。如此伟大的人不会就此立刻撒手人寰，他将受到人们的尊重，被称为高尚的灵魂，他是盖乌斯的又一受害者，我们确信你将永垂不朽。

但是，要驱除个人伤痛的原因是没有意义的，因为我们有时会陷入对整个人类的仇恨中。当你想到单纯多么稀罕，天真多么无人知晓，除了极其短暂的机会忠诚又是多么少见，你碰见过多少罪行得逞，人们由于贪财好色干出的事，无论是得还是失，都是同样地可恶，还有，从不给自己设限的野心，现在如何从恶习中获得荣耀的——所有这些使心灵坠入了黑暗之中将其笼罩于阴影之下，似乎那些美德都被打翻，希求美德既不可能，拥有美德也毫无用处。所以我们必须教育自己不要认为那些普遍存在的恶习可恨，而要看做可笑，我们应该仿效德谟克利特，而不要仿效赫拉克利特。因为当他们走到大庭广众之中，后者总是哭，而前者总是笑，后者认为我们所有的活动都可悲，而前者则认为愚蠢。所以我们不要把这些事情看得太严重，而应该宽容它们，嘲弄生活总比哀叹生活要开化多了。还要记住：对生活付之一笑的人比对生活充满忧伤的人更优秀，因为笑对人生的人对生活留有美好的希望，而另一种人对那些无望纠正的事情只是愚蠢地悲叹。而且，全盘考虑这些事情，会发现开怀大笑比涕泗滂沱是更博大的思想的表现，因为笑表达的是我们最温柔的情

感，而且认为我们生存的一切外在东西都无所谓强烈、严重，甚至不幸。每个人如果都好好考虑给我们带来喜与悲的每件事情，他就会领会比翁箴言的真谛：人类所做的一切都和他起始时一样，他们的生命并没有比孕育时更高尚更恶劣，生时一无所有，最终回归于一无所有。不过，能够平静地接受大众的行为方式和人类的缺陷则更为妥当，不要失控于大笑或哭泣。因为为别人的痛苦而苦恼意味着永恒的烦扰，而从别人的痛苦中获取快乐则是一种缺少人性的快乐，就如看到别人埋葬自己儿子时你也哭泣或表情庄重都是没必要表达的慈悲。对于自己的烦恼也是一样，得体的举止应是，悲哀的程度应合乎自然，而不是合乎旧俗。很多人哭是给别人看的，只要没人看，眼睛就是干的了，因为他们觉得当每个人都在哭的时候自己不哭是不得体的。这种跟在别人后面亦步亦趋的恶习如此根深蒂固，连人的最基本的感情——悲痛——的表达也沦为模仿他人。

我们接着还必须看看一种有足够理由引起我们悲哀和焦虑的情况。当好人没有落到好下场时，当苏格拉底被迫死于狱中，当茹提利乌斯被流放，当庞培和西塞罗不得不在自己的门客面前引颈受戮，当加图这个道德的典范，挥剑自刎向世界表明自己和自己的国家已是大难临头时，我们会为命运如此不公平地给予回报而感到忿忿不平。那么，我们每个人在看到这些最出色的人遭到最悲惨的下场时对自己会有怎样的祈望呢？接下来会怎样呢？好好看看这些人是怎么忍受自己的命运的。如果他们是勇敢的，就以你的精神来希求得到他们那种精神；如果他们像女人似地懦弱死去，那么就死得全无价值。他们或因勇敢而值得你赞赏或因懦弱不值得你想念。崇高伟大的人勇敢赴死而使别人感到恐惧，还有比这更耻辱的吗？让我们反复夸奖那些值得夸奖的人，让我们说：

“人越勇敢，就越幸福！你已经逃过了所有的劫难、嫉恨和疾病，你已经出狱——并非因为对诸神来说你就该命途多舛，而是命运再掌控你已没有价值了。”但对那些在赴死之前退缩不舍，回望生活的人，我们应该嗤之以鼻。我不会为幸福的人哭泣，也不会为哭泣的人哭泣，前者会亲手拭去我的泪水，后者因其泪水而不配我为之洒下热泪。我应该为被活活烧死的赫拉克勒斯哭泣吗？或者为瑞古拉斯，因为那么多钉子都戳进他的身体，或者为加图，因为他使自己的伤口又受伤？所有这些人因为放弃短暂而变得永生，因为死亡而成就不朽。

如果你太在意自己的模样而不向任何人公开地表露自己，就像很多人过着虚伪的生活，只想以外表示人，那么就会有产生焦虑的另一大缘由。总是小心翼翼唯恐自己平日的面具滑脱而被人看到，这也是很令人苦恼不安的。当我们想到每当被人看到时总会被人评头品足，这也会使我们不无忧虑，有很多事情是在我们不情愿的时候揭掉了假象，即便这种对自己的关注是正面的，那种总在面具后面的日子也是不开心甚至令人堪忧的。相反，诚实，自然、无修饰的质朴，毫不掩饰自己的个性的生活是多么快乐无忧啊！一旦所有的事情向所有的人曝光，这种生活还难免会有被人鄙视的危险，因为对于某些人来说，熟悉就会产生轻蔑。但是，近距离观察，道德也不会有贬值的危险，质朴而被轻视总比长久装假而苦恼好吧。让我们在这里仍采取中庸之道吧，简朴生活与马马虎虎过日子是有很大区别的。

我们还应该多多回归自我，因为和与自己不同的人接触会扰乱平静的天性，又会触动激情，加重尚未治愈的心理缺陷。然而独处与合群这两种方式必须中和与变通，第一种使我们渴望与人们接触，另一种又使我们渴望自己的空间，每一种对于另一种都是一种补救：独处使我们缓解对人多的厌

烦，而从众又会消除因独处而产生的乏味。

人的思想不会总一直专注于同一件事，而是要进行一些有趣的消遣。苏格拉底不会因与小孩子在一起玩耍而脸红；加图在料理国事感到疲倦了的时候也会以酒来放松自己的心情；西庇奥过去常常以跳舞来放松那常胜军人的身躯，不是跳现在那种缓慢娇柔的舞蹈，那种让现代男人走路都效仿、扭摆起来比女人还性感的风格，而是过去那种男人在娱乐和节日时跳的充满阳刚之气的舞蹈，这种舞蹈即使在敌人的注视下都不会失去尊严。我们的心情必须放松，休憩之后精神会更饱满、机敏，就如同我们不能强求农田不断高产，那样会使田地很快耗竭，而长时间努力工作也会耗尽我们的精力，短时间的休息和放松则会使能量恢复。长期不间断地工作会使大脑迟钝、疲惫。如果运动和游戏不能带来一种正常的快乐，人们也不会乐于从事，虽然反复沉迷于这些娱乐活动也会使人的思想失重，脑力受到损害。还要谨记的是，睡眠对于恢复体力也是非常必要的，但是如果睡眠时间太长，白天黑夜地睡，那无异于死亡。松驰和放任是有很大区别的。法律制定者规定了假期以使人们按公家要求享有放松的假日，他们认为这样可以使工作达到一种平衡，而如我说过的，某些重要人物每个月给自己规定固定的日子作为假日，而另一些人把每一天分为休息和工作几个时间段。我记得伟大的演说家阿西尼乌斯·波利奥的习惯是每天工作十小时①后就休息，十小时后连信件都不看了，以免出现新的问题需要处理，他可以在余下的两个小时内摆脱一天的疲劳。有的人中午休息一会儿，把不太要紧的工作留在下午做。我们的前辈还禁

① 古罗马人将每天日出和日落之间的时间分为12个小时。阿西尼乌斯·波利奥在这12小时中，前10小时工作，然后就休息。

止元老院工作十小时后提出任何新的动议。军队将警卫工作分班轮流做，那些刚刚返回的长途巡警不再安排夜间值班。我们必须照顾好我们的思想，不时地让思想休息一下，这是给它补充营养和力量。我们必须到户外去散步，晴朗的天空、新鲜的空气会给我们增添能量与活力。有时我们的心灵需要从乘车出游、景色的变换、社交活动和无拘无束的畅饮中获取能量。偶尔我们甚至要沉浸在酒中陶醉一下，但不是酩酊大醉，这样确实可以冲走烦恼，彻底触动心灵，治愈哀愁，就如治愈某些疾病一般。酒的发明者之所以被称为“解放者”，并非因为酒给了舌头自由让饮者畅所欲言，而是因为他使心灵从被禁锢的状态解脱出来，受到关爱，得到自由，增添活力，并鼓励它大胆从事自己所有的事业。然而，饮酒有一个从健康考虑的适度的问题，就如自由也要有度一般。人们认为梭伦和阿尔凯西劳斯很喜欢喝酒，而有人指责加图酗酒，可任何指责他的人会很容易使加图令人景仰，而不是让他名誉扫地。但我们不能总是饮酒，以免养成坏习惯，但有时可以刺激一下，让心情无拘束地快活一下，暂时收起那一本正经的严肃。无论我们是否认同希腊诗人所说的“有时癫狂也很可爱”，或柏拉图说的“一个理智健全的人要想敲开诗歌王国的大门是徒劳的”，或亚里斯多德所说的“智力超群的人没有不带一点儿癫狂的”，事实是只有心灵被深深触动之后才能写出不同凡响、他人难以企及的作品。只有当它对平庸陈腐的思想不屑一顾，凭借神性的想象力振翮高飞时，才能发出超凡脱俗的高雅心声。只要它停留在自己原有的感觉中，它就不可能达到高难的程度，它必须舍弃惯常的跑道向前驶去，迫不及待地催促驾驭者沿着自己的路线到达一个它自身不敢攀登的高度。

所以，亲爱的塞雷努斯，你现在有了保持心灵宁静的方

法，恢复心灵宁静的方法，以及克服那些无意中渐渐染上的缺点的方法。但是可以肯定，除非那摇摆不定的心灵能够时时刻刻得到精心呵护，这些方法都不足以维护如此脆弱的一个东西。

Seneca

On the Shortness of Life

TRANSLATED BY C. D. N. COSTA

PENGUIN BOOKS — GREAT IDEAS

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On the Shortness of Life

Most human beings, Paulinus,* complain about the meanness of nature, because we are born for a brief span of life, and because this spell of time that has been given to us rushes by so swiftly and rapidly that with very few exceptions life ceases for the rest of us just when we are getting ready for it. Nor is it just the man in the street and the unthinking mass of people who groan over this – as they see it – universal evil: the same feeling lies behind complaints from even distinguished men. Hence the dictum of the greatest of doctors:† 'Life is short, art is long.' Hence too the grievance, most improper to a wise man, which Aristotle expressed when he was taking nature to task for indulging animals with such long existences that they can live through five or ten human lifetimes, while a far shorter limit is set for men who are born to a great and extensive destiny. It is not that we have a short time to live, but that we waste a lot of it. Life is long enough, and a sufficiently generous amount has been given to us for the highest achievements if it were all well invested. But when it is wasted in heedless luxury and spent on no good activity, we are forced at last by death's final constraint to realize that it has passed

* A friend of Seneca's.

† Hippocrates.

away before we knew it was passing. So it is: we are not given a short life but we make it short, and we are not ill-supplied but wasteful of it. Just as when ample and princely wealth falls to a bad owner it is squandered in a moment, but wealth however modest, if entrusted to a good custodian, increases with use, so our lifetime extends amply if you manage it properly.

Why do we complain about nature? She has acted kindly: life is long if you know how to use it. But one man is gripped by insatiable greed, another by a laborious dedication to useless tasks. One man is soaked in wine, another sluggish with idleness. One man is worn out by political ambition, which is always at the mercy of the judgement of others. Another through hope of profit is driven headlong over all lands and seas by the greed of trading. Some are tormented by a passion for army life, always intent on inflicting dangers on others or anxious about danger to themselves. Some are worn out by the self-imposed servitude of thankless attendance on the great. Many are occupied by either pursuing other people's money or complaining about their own. Many pursue no fixed goal, but are tossed about in ever-changing designs by a fickleness which is shifting, inconstant and never satisfied with itself. Some have no aims at all for their life's course, but death takes them unawares as they yawn languidly – so much so that I cannot doubt the truth of that oracular remark of the greatest of poets: 'It is a small part of life we really live.' Indeed, all the rest is not life but merely time. Vices surround and assail men from every side, and do not allow them to rise again and lift their eyes to discern the

truth, but keep them overwhelmed and rooted in their desires. Never can they recover their true selves. If by chance they achieve some tranquillity, just as a swell remains on the deep sea even after the wind has dropped, so they go on tossing about and never find rest from their desires. Do you think I am speaking only of those whose wickedness is acknowledged? Look at those whose good fortune people gather to see: they are choked by their own blessings. How many find their riches a burden! How many burst a blood vessel by their eloquence and their daily striving to show off their talents! How many are pale from constant pleasures! How many are left no freedom by the crowd of clients surrounding them! In a word, run through them all, from lowest to highest: one calls for legal assistance, another comes to help; one is on trial, another defends him, another gives a judgment; no one makes his claim to himself, but each is exploited for another's sake. Ask about those whose names are learned by heart, and you will see that they have these distinguishing marks: X cultivates Y and Y cultivates Z – no one bothers about himself. Again, certain people reveal the most stupid indignation: they complain about the pride of their superiors because they did not have time to give them an audience when they wanted one. But can anyone dare to complain about another's pride when he himself never has time for himself? Yet whoever you are, the great man has sometimes gazed upon you, even if his look was patronizing, he has bent his ears to your words, he has let you walk beside him. But you never deign to look at yourself or listen to yourself. So you have no reason to

claim credit from anyone for those attentions, since you showed them not because you wanted someone else's company but because you could not bearyour own.

Even if all the bright intellects who ever lived were to agree to ponder this one theme, they would never sufficiently express their surprise at this fog in the human mind. Men do not let anyone seize their estates, and if there is the slightest dispute about their boundaries they rush to stones and arms; but they allow others to encroach on their lives – why, they themselves even invite in those who will take over their lives. You will find no one willing to share out his money; but to how many does each of us divide up his life! People are frugal in guarding their personal property; but as soon as it comes to squandering time they are most wasteful of the one thing in which it is right to be stingy. So, I would like to fasten on someone from the older generation and say to him: 'I see that you have come to the last stage of human life; you are close upon your hundredth year, or even beyond: come now, hold an audit of your life. Reckon how much of your time has been taken up by a money-lender, how much by a mistress, a patron, a client, quarrelling with your wife, punishing your slaves, dashing about the city on your social obligations. Consider also the diseases which we have brought on ourselves, and the time too which has been unused. You will find that you have fewer years than you reckon. Call to mind when you ever had a fixed purpose; how few days have passed as you had planned; when you were ever at your own disposal; when your face wore its natural expression; when your mind was undisturbed;

what work you have achieved in such a long life; how many have plundered your life when you were unaware of your losses; how much you have lost through groundless sorrow, foolish joy, greedy desire, the seductions of society; how little of your own was left to you. You will realize that you are dying prematurely.'

So what is the reason for this? You are living as if destined to live for ever; your own frailty never occurs to you; you don't notice how much time has already passed, but squander it as though you had a full and overflowing supply – though all the while that very day which you are devoting to somebody or something may be your last. You act like mortals in all that you fear, and like immortals in all that you desire. You will hear many people saying: 'When I am fifty I shall retire into leisure; when I am sixty I shall give up public duties.' And what guarantee do you have of a longer life? Who will allow your course to proceed as you arrange it? Aren't you ashamed to keep for yourself just the remnants of your life, and to devote to wisdom only that time which cannot be spent on any business? How late it is to begin really to live just when life must end! How stupid to forget our mortality, and put off sensible plans to our fiftieth and sixtieth years, aiming to begin life from a point at which few have arrived!

You will notice that the most powerful and highly stationed men let drop remarks in which they pray for leisure, praise it, and rate it higher than all their blessings. At times they long to descend from their pinnacles if they can in safety; for even if nothing external assails or agitates it, high fortune of itself comes crashing down.

The deified Augustus, to whom the gods granted more than to anyone else, never ceased to pray for rest and to seek a respite from public affairs. Everything he said always reverted to this theme – his hope for leisure. He used to beguile his labours with this consolation, sweet though false, that one day he would live to please himself. In a letter he wrote to the senate, after he promised that his rest would not be lacking in dignity nor inconsistent with his former glory, I find these words: 'But it is more impressive to carry out these things than to promise them. Nevertheless, since the delightful reality is still a long way off, my longing for that much desired time has led me to anticipate some of its delight by the pleasure arising from words.' So valuable did leisure seem to him that because he could not enjoy it in actuality, he did so mentally in advance. He who saw that everything depended on himself alone, who decided the fortune of individuals and nations, was happiest when thinking of that day on which he would lay aside his own greatness. He knew from experience how much sweat those blessings gleaming through every land cost him, how many secret anxieties they concealed. He was forced to fight first with his fellow-countrymen, then with his colleagues, and finally with his relations, shedding blood on land and sea. Driven to fight in Macedonia, Sicily, Egypt, Syria, Asia – almost every country – he turned his armies against foreign enemies when they were tired of shedding Roman blood. While he was establishing peace in the Alps and subduing enemies established in the middle of his peaceful empire; while he was extending his boundaries beyond the Rhine,

the Euphrates and the Danube, at Rome itself Murena, Caepio, Lepidus, Egnatius and others were sharpening their swords against him. Nor had he yet escaped their plots when his daughter and all the noble youths bound to her by adultery as though by an oath kept alarming his feeble old age, as did Iullus and a second formidable woman linked to an Antony. He cut away these ulcers, limbs and all, but others took their place: just like a body with a surfeit of blood which is always subject to a haemorrhage somewhere. So he longed for leisure, and as his hopes and thoughts dwelt on that he found relief for his labours: this was the prayer of the man who could grant the prayers of mankind.

When Marcus Cicero was cast among men like Catiline and Clodius and Pompey and Crassus – some of them undisguised enemies and some doubtful friends – when he was tossed about in the storm that struck the state, he tried to hold it steady as it went to its doom; but at last he was swept away. He had neither peace in prosperity nor patience in adversity, and how often does he curse that very consulship, which he had praised without ceasing though not without good reason! What woeful words he uses in a letter to Atticus when the elder Pompey had been conquered, and his son was still trying to revive his defeated forces in Spain! 'Do you want to know,' he said, 'what I am doing here? I am staying a semi-prisoner in my Tusculan villa.' He then goes on to bewail his former life, to complain of the present, and to despair of the future. Cicero called himself a semi-prisoner, but really and truly the wise man will never go so far as to use such an abject term. He will

never be a semi-prisoner, but will always enjoy freedom which is solid and complete, at liberty to be his own master and higher than all others. For what can be above the man who is above fortune?

Livius Drusus, a bold and vigorous man, had proposed laws which renewed the evil policy of the Gracchi, and he was supported by a huge crowd from all over Italy. But he could see no successful outcome for his measures, which he could neither carry through nor abandon once embarked upon; and he is said to have cursed the turbulent life he had always lived, saying that he alone had never had a holiday even as a child. For while still a ward and dressed as a youth he ventured to speak to a jury in favour of some accused men, and to acquire influence in the law courts, with so much effect that, as we all know, he forced certain verdicts favourable to his clients. To what lengths would so precocious an ambition not go? You might have known that such premature boldness would result in terrible trouble, both public and private. So he was too late in complaining that he had never had a holiday, since from his boyhood he had been a serious trouble-maker in the Forum. It is uncertain whether he died by his own hand, for he collapsed after receiving a sudden wound in the groin, some people doubting whether his death was self-inflicted, but no one doubting that it was timely.

It would be superfluous to mention any more who, though seeming to others the happiest of mortals, themselves bore true witness against themselves by their expressed hatred of every action of their lives. Yet they did not change themselves or anyone else by these com-

plaints, for after their explosion of words their feelings reverted to normal.

Assuredly your lives, even if they last more than a thousand years, will shrink into the tiniest span: those vices will swallow up any space of time. The actual time you have – which reason can prolong though it naturally passes quickly – inevitably escapes you rapidly: for you do not grasp it or hold it back or try to delay that swiftest of all things, but you let it slip away as though it were something superfluous and replaceable.

But among the worst offenders I count those who spend all their time in drinking and lust, for these are the worst preoccupations of all. Other people, even if they are possessed by an illusory semblance of glory, suffer from a respectable delusion. You can give me a list of miserly men, or hot-tempered men who indulge in unjust hatreds or wars: but they are all sinning in a more manly way. It is those who are on a headlong course of gluttony and lust who are stained with dishonour. Examine how all these people spend their time – how long they devote to their accounts, to laying traps for others or fearing those laid for themselves, to paying court to others or being courted themselves, to giving or receiving bail, to banquets (which now count as official business): you will see how their activities, good or bad, do not give them even time to breathe.

Finally, it is generally agreed that no activity can be successfully pursued by an individual who is preoccupied – not rhetoric or liberal studies – since the mind when distracted absorbs nothing deeply, but rejects everything which is, so to speak, crammed into it. Living is the least

important activity of the preoccupied man; yet there is nothing which is harder to learn. There are many instructors in the other arts to be found everywhere: indeed, some of these arts mere boys have grasped so thoroughly that they can even teach them. But learning how to live takes a whole life, and, which may surprise you more, it takes a whole life to learn how to die. So many of the finest men have put aside all their encumbrances, renouncing riches and business and pleasure, and made it their one aim up to the end of their lives to know how to live. Yet most of these have died confessing that they did not yet know – still less can those others know. Believe me, it is the sign of a great man, and one who is above human error, not to allow his time to be frittered away: he has the longest possible life simply because whatever time was available he devoted entirely to himself. None of it lay fallow and neglected, none of it under another's control; for being an extremely thrifty guardian of his time he never found anything for which it was worth exchanging. So he had enough time; but those into whose lives the public have made great inroads inevitably have too little.

Nor must you think that such people do not sometimes recognize their loss. Indeed, you will hear many of those to whom great prosperity is a burden sometimes crying out amidst their hordes of clients or their pleadings in law courts or their other honourable miseries. 'It's impossible to live.' Of course it's impossible. All those who call you to themselves draw you away from yourself. How many days has that defendant stolen from you? Or that candidate? Or that old lady worn out with burying her heirs? Or that man shamming an illness to

excite the greed of legacy-hunters? Or that influential friend who keeps people like you not for friendship but for display? Mark off, I tell you, and review the days of your life: you will see that very few – the useless remnants – have been left to you. One man who has achieved the badge of office he coveted longs to lay it aside, and keeps repeating, 'Will this year never end?' Another man thought it a great coup to win the chance of giving games, but, having given them, he says, 'When shall I be rid of them?' That advocate is grabbed on every side throughout the Forum, and fills the whole place with a huge crowd extending further than he can be heard: but he says, 'When will vacation come?' Everyone hustles his life along, and is troubled by a longing for the future and weariness of the present. But the man who spends all his time on his own needs, who organizes every day as though it were his last, neither longs for nor fears the next day. For what new pleasures can any hour now bring him? He has tried everything, and enjoyed everything to repletion. For the rest, Fortune can dispose as she likes: his life is now secure. Nothing can be taken from this life, and you can only add to it as if giving to a man who is already full and satisfied food which he does not want but can hold. So you must not think a man has lived long because he has white hair and wrinkles: he has not lived long, just existed long. For suppose you should think that a man had had a long voyage who had been caught in a raging storm as he left harbour, and carried hither and thither and driven round and round in a circle by the rage of opposing winds? He did not have a long voyage, just a long tossing about.

I am always surprised to see some people demanding the time of others and meeting a most obliging response. Both sides have in view the reason for which the time is asked and neither regards the time itself – as if nothing there is being asked for and nothing given. They are trifling with life's most precious commodity, being deceived because it is an intangible thing, not open to inspection and therefore reckoned very cheap – in fact, almost without any value. People are delighted to accept pensions and gratuities, for which they hire out their labour or their support or their services. But nobody works out the value of time: men use it lavishly as if it cost nothing. But if death threatens these same people, you will see them praying to their doctors; if they are in fear of capital punishment, you will see them prepared to spend their all to stay alive. So inconsistent are they in their feelings. But if each of us could have the tally of his future years set before him, as we can of our past years, how alarmed would be those who saw only a few years ahead, and how carefully would they use them! And yet it is easy to organize an amount, however small, which is assured; we have to be more careful in preserving what will cease at an unknown point.

But you are not to think that these people do not know how precious time is. They commonly say to those they are particularly fond of that they are ready to give them some of their years. And they do give them without being aware of it; but the gift is such that they themselves lose without adding anything to the others. But what they actually do not know is whether they are losing; thus they can bear the loss of what they do not

know has gone. No one will bring back the years; no one will restore you to yourself. Life will follow the path it began to take, and will neither reverse nor check its course. It will cause no commotion to remind you of its swiftness, but glide on quietly. It will not lengthen itself for a king's command or a people's favour. As it started out on its first day, so it will run on, nowhere pausing or turning aside. What will be the outcome? You have been preoccupied while life hastens on. Meanwhile death will arrive, and you have no choice in making yourself available for that.

Can anything be more idiotic than certain people who boast of their foresight? They keep themselves officiously preoccupied in order to improve their lives; they spend their lives in organizing their lives. They direct their purposes with an eye to a distant future. But putting things off is the biggest waste of life: it snatches away each day as it comes, and denies us the present by promising the future. The greatest obstacle to living is expectancy, which hangs upon tomorrow and loses today. You are arranging what lies in Fortune's control, and abandoning what lies in yours. What are you looking at? To what goal are you straining? The whole future lies in uncertainty: live immediately. Listen to the cry of our greatest poet, who as though inspired with divine utterance sings salutary verses:

> Life's finest day for wretched mortals here
> Is always first to flee.

'Why do you linger?' he means. 'Why are you idle? If you don't grasp it first, it flees.' And even if you do grasp it, it will still flee. So you must match time's swiftness with your speed in using it, and you must drink quickly as though from a rapid stream that will not always flow. In chastising endless delay, too, the poet very elegantly speaks not of the 'finest age' but 'finest day'. However greedy you are, why are you so unconcerned and so sluggish (while time flies so fast), extending months and years in a long sequence ahead of you? The poet is telling you about the day – and about this very day that is escaping. So can it be doubted that for wretched mortals – that is, the preoccupied – the finest day is always the first to flee? Old age overtakes them while they are still mentally childish, and they face it unprepared and unarmed. For they have made no provision for it, stumbling upon it suddenly and unawares, and without realizing that it was approaching day by day. Just as travellers are beguiled by conversation or reading or some profound meditation, and find they have arrived at their destination before they knew they were approaching it; so it is with this unceasing and extremely fast-moving journey of life, which waking or sleeping we make at the same pace – the preoccupied become aware of it only when it is over.

If I wanted to divide my theme into different headings and offer proofs, I would find many arguments to prove that the preoccupied find life very short. But Fabianus, who was not one of today's academic philosophers but the true old-fashioned sort, used to say that we must attack the passions by brute force and not by logic; that

the enemy's line must be turned by a strong attack and not by pinpricks; for vices have to be crushed rather than picked at. Still, in order that the people concerned may be censured for their own individual faults, they must be taught and not just given up for lost.

Life is divided into three periods, past, present and future. Of these, the present is short, the future is doubtful, the past is certain. For this last is the one over which Fortune has lost her power, which cannot be brought back to anyone's control. But this is what preoccupied people lose: for they have no time to look back at their past, and even if they did, it is not pleasant to recall activities they are ashamed of. So they are unwilling to cast their minds back to times ill spent, which they dare not relive if their vices in recollection become obvious – even those vices whose insidious approach was disguised by the charm of some momentary pleasure. No one willingly reverts to the past unless all his actions have passed his own censorship, which is never deceived. The man who must fear his own memory is the one who has been ambitious in his greed, arrogant in his contempt, uncontrolled in his victories, treacherous in his deceptions, rapacious in his plundering, and wasteful in his squandering. And yet this is the period of our time which is sacred and dedicated, which has passed beyond all human risks and is removed from Fortune's sway, which cannot be harassed by want or fear or attacks of illness. It cannot be disturbed or snatched from us: it is an untroubled, everlasting possession. In the present we have only one day at a time, each offering a minute at a time. But all the days of the past will come to your call:

you can detain and inspect them at your will – something which the preoccupied have no time to do. It is the mind which is tranquil and free from care which can roam through all the stages of its life: the minds of the preoccupied, as if harnessed in a yoke, cannot turn round and look behind them. So their lives vanish into an abyss; and just as it is no use pouring any amount of liquid into a container without a bottom to catch and hold it, so it does not matter how much time we are given if there is nowhere for it to settle; it escapes through the cracks and holes of the mind. The present time is extremely short, so much so that some people are unaware of it. For it is always on the move, flowing on in a rush; it ceases before it has come, and does not suffer delay any more than the firmament or the stars, whose unceasing movement never pauses in the same place. And so the preoccupied are concerned only with the present, and it is so short that it cannot be grasped, and even this is stolen from them while they are involved in their many distractions.

In a word, would you like to know how they do not live long? See how keen they are to live long. Feeble old men pray for a few more years; they pretend they are younger than they are; they comfort themselves by this deception and fool themselves as eagerly as if they fooled Fate at the same time. But when at last some illness has reminded them of their mortality, how terrified do they die, as if they were not just passing out of life but being dragged out of it. They exclaim that they were fools because they have not really lived, and that if only they can recover from this illness they will live in leisure.

Then they reflect how pointlessly they acquired things they never would enjoy, and how all their toil has been in vain. But for those whose life is far removed from all business it must be amply long. None of it is frittered away, none of it scattered here and there, none of it committed to fortune, none of it lost through carelessness, none of it wasted on largesse, none of it superfluous: the whole of it, so to speak, is well invested. So, however short, it is fully sufficient, and therefore whenever his last day comes, the wise man will not hesitate to meet death with a firm step.

Perhaps you want to know whom I would call the preoccupied? You must not imagine I mean just those who are driven from the law court only by the arrival of the watchdogs; or those whom you see crushed either honourably in their own crowd of supporters or contemptuously in someone else's; or those whose social duties bring them forth from their own homes to dash them against someone else's doors; or those whom the praetor's auction spear occupies in acquiring disreputable gain which will one day turn rank upon them. Some men are preoccupied even in their leisure: in their country house, on their couch, in the midst of solitude, even when quite alone, they are their own worst company. You could not call theirs a life of leisure, but an idle preoccupation. Do you call that man leisured who arranges with anxious precision his Corinthian bronzes, the cost of which is inflated by the mania of a few collectors, and spends most of the day on rusty bits of metal? Who sits at a wrestling ring (for shame on us! We suffer from vices which are not even Roman), keenly

following the bouts between boys? Who classifies his herds of pack-animals into pairs according to age and colour? Who pays for the maintenance of the latest athletes? Again, do you call those men leisured who spend many hours at the barber's simply to cut whatever grew overnight, to have a serious debate about every separate hair, to tidy up disarranged locks or to train thinning ones from the sides to lie over the forehead? How angry they get if the barber has been a bit careless – as if he were trimming a real man! How they flare up if any of their mane is wrongly cut off, if any of it is badly arranged, or if it doesn't all fall into the right ringlets! Which of them would not rather have his country ruffled than his hair? Which would not be more anxious about the elegance of his head than its safety? Which would not rather be trim than honourable? Do you call those men leisured who divide their time between the comb and the mirror? And what about those who busy themselves in composing, listening to, or learning songs, while they distort their voice, whose best and simplest tone nature intended to be the straight one, into the most unnatural modulations; who are always drumming with their fingers as they beat time to an imagined tune; whom you can hear humming to themselves even when they are summoned on a serious, often even sorrowful, affair? Theirs is not leisure but indolent occupation. And, good heavens, as for their banquets, I would not reckon on them as leisure times when I see how anxiously they arrange their silver, how carefully they gird up the tunics of their page-boys, how on tenterhooks they are to see how the cook has dealt with the boar, with what speed

smooth-faced slaves rush around on their duties, with what skill birds are carved into appropriate portions, how carefully wretched little slaves wipe up the spittle of drunkards. By these means they cultivate a reputation for elegance and good taste, and to such an extent do their failings follow them into all areas of their private lives that they cannot eat or drink without ostentation.

I would also not count as leisured those who are carried around in a sedan chair and a litter, and turn up punctually for their drives as if it was forbidden to give them up; who have to be told when to bathe or to swim or to dine: they are so enervated by the excessive torpor of a self-indulgent mind that they cannot trust themselves to know if they are hungry. I am told that one of these self-indulgent people – if self-indulgence is the right word for unlearning the ordinary habits of human life – when he had been carried out from the bath and put in his sedan chair, asked, 'Am I now sitting down?' Do you think that this man, who doesn't know if he is sitting down, knows whether he is alive, whether he sees, whether he is at leisure? It is difficult to say whether I pity him more if he really did not know this or if he pretended not to know. They really experience forgetfulness of many things, but they also pretend to forget many things. They take delight in certain vices as proofs of their good fortune: it seems to be the lowly and contemptible man who knows what he is doing. After that see if you can accuse the mimes of inventing many details in order to attack luxury! In truth, they pass over more than they make up, and such a wealth of incredible vices have appeared in this generation, which shows

talent in this one area, that we could now actually accuse the mimes of ignoring them. To think that there is anyone so lost in luxuries that he has to trust another to tell him if he is sitting down! So this one is not at leisure, and you must give him another description – he is ill, or even, he is dead: the man who is really at leisure is also aware of it. But this one who is only half alive, and needs to be told the positions of his own body – how can he have control over any of his time?

It would be tedious to mention individually those who have spent all their lives playing draughts or ball, or carefully cooking themselves in the sun. They are not at leisure whose pleasures involve a serious commitment. For example, nobody will dispute that those people are busy about nothing who spend their time on useless literary studies: even among the Romans there is now a large company of these. It used to be a Greek failing to want to know how many oarsmen Ulysses had, whether the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* was written first, and whether too they were by the same author, and other questions of this kind, which if you keep them to yourself in no way enhance your private knowledge, and if you publish them make you appear more a bore than a scholar. But now the Romans too have been afflicted by the pointless enthusiasm for useless knowledge. Recently I heard somebody reporting which Roman general first did this or that: Duilius first won a naval battle; Curius Dentatus first included elephants in a triumph. So far these facts, even if they do not contribute to real glory, at least are concerned with exemplary services to the state: such knowledge will not do us any good, but it interests us

because of the appeal of these pointless facts. We can also excuse those who investigate who first persuaded the Romans to embark on a ship. That was Claudius, who for this reason was called Caudex because a structure linking several wooden planks was called in antiquity a *caudex*. Hence too the Law Tables are called *codices*, and even today the boats which carry provisions up the Tiber are called by the old-fashioned name *codicariae*. Doubtless too it is of some importance to know that Valerius Corvinus first conquered Messana, and was the first of the family of the Valerii to be surnamed Messana from the name of the captured city – the spelling of which was gradually corrupted in everyday speech to Messalla. Perhaps you will also allow someone to take seriously the fact that Lucius Sulla first exhibited lions loose in the Circus, though at other times they were shown in fetters, and that javelin-throwers were sent by King Bocchus to kill them. This too may be excused – but does it serve any good purpose? – to know that Pompey first exhibited in the Circus a fight involving eighteen elephants, pitting innocent men against them in a staged battle. A leader of the state and, as we are told, a man of notable kindliness among the leaders of old, he thought it would be a memorable spectacle to kill human beings in a novel way. 'Are they to fight to the death? Not good enough. Are they to be torn to pieces? Not good enough. Let them be crushed by animals of enormous bulk.' It would be better for such things to be forgotten, lest in the future someone in power might learn about them and not wish to be outdone in such a piece of inhumanity. Oh, what darkness does great prosperity cast

over our minds! He thought himself beyond nature's laws at the time that he was throwing so many crowds of wretched men to wild creatures from abroad, when he was setting such disparate creatures against each other, when he was shedding so much blood in front of the Roman people, who themselves were soon to be forced by him to shed their own blood. But later he himself, betrayed by Alexandrian treachery, offered himself to be stabbed by the lowest slave, only then realizing that his surname ('Great') was an empty boast.

But to return to the point from which I digressed, and to illustrate how some people spend useless efforts on these same topics, the man I referred to reported that Metellus in his triumph, after conquering the Carthaginians in Sicily, alone among all the Romans had 120 elephants led before his chariot, and that Sulla was the last of the Romans to have extended the *pomerium*,* which it was the ancient practice to extend after acquiring Italian, but never provincial, territory. Is it better to know this than to know that the Aventine Hill, as he asserted, is outside the *pomerium* for one of two reasons, either because the plebs withdrew to it or because when Remus took the auspices there the birds had not been favourable – and countless further theories that are either false or very close to lies? For even if you admit that they say all this in good faith, even if they guarantee the truth of their statements, whose mistakes will thereby be lessened? Whose passions restrained? Who will be made more free, more just, more magnanimous? Our Fabianus

* The religious boundary of a city.

used to say that sometimes he wondered whether it was better not to be involved in any researches than to get entangled in these.

Of all people only those are at leisure who make time for philosophy, only those are really alive. For they not only keep a good watch over their own lifetimes, but they annex every age to theirs. All the years that have passed before them are added to their own. Unless we are very ungrateful, all those distinguished founders of holy creeds were born for us and prepared for us a way of life. By the toil of others we are led into the presence of things which have been brought from darkness into light. We are excluded from no age, but we have access to them all; and if we are prepared in loftiness of mind to pass beyond the narrow confines of human weakness, there is a long period of time through which we can roam. We can argue with Socrates, express doubt with Carneades, cultivate retirement with Epicurus, overcome human nature with the Stoics, and exceed its limits with the Cynics. Since nature allows us to enter into a partnership with every age, why not turn from this brief and transient spell of time and give ourselves wholeheartedly to the past, which is limitless and eternal and can be shared with better men than we?

Those who rush about on social duties, disturbing both themselves and others, when they have duly finished their crazy round and have daily crossed everyone's threshold and passed by no open door, when they have carried around their self-interested greetings to houses that are miles apart, how few will they be able to see in a city so enormous and so distracted by varied

desires? How many will there be who through sleepiness or self-indulgence or ungraciousness will exclude them? How many, after keeping them in an agony of waiting, will pretend to be in a hurry and rush past them? How many will avoid going out through a hall crowded with dependants, and escape through a secret door – as if it were not even more discourteous to deceive callers than to exclude them? How many, half asleep and sluggish after yesterday's drinking, will yawn insolently and have to be prompted a thousand times in a whisper before, scarcely moving their lips, they can greet by name the poor wretches who have broken their own slumbers in order to wait on another's?

You should rather suppose that those are involved in worthwhile duties who wish to have daily as their closest friends Zeno, Pythagoras, Democritus and all the other high priests of liberal studies, and Aristotle and Theophrastus. None of these will be too busy to see you, none of these will not send his visitor away happier and more devoted to himself, none of these will allow anyone to depart empty-handed. They are at home to all mortals by night and by day.

None of these will force you to die, but all will teach you how to die. None of them will exhaust your years, but each will contribute his years to yours. With none of these will conversation be dangerous, or his friendship fatal, or attendance on him expensive. From them you can take whatever you wish: it will not be their fault if you do not take your fill from them. What happiness, what a fine old age awaits the man who has made himself a client of these! He will have friends whose advice he

can ask on the most important or the most trivial matters, whom he can consult daily about himself, who will tell him the truth without insulting him and praise him without flattery, who will offer him a pattern on which to model himself.

We are in the habit of saying that it was not in our power to choose the parents who were allotted to us, that they were given to us by chance. But we can choose whose children we would like to be. There are households of the noblest intellects: choose the one into which you wish to be adopted, and you will inherit not only their name but their property too. Nor will this property need to be guarded meanly or grudgingly: the more it is shared out, the greater it will become. These will offer you a path to immortality and raise you to a point from which no one is cast down. This is the only way to prolong mortality – even to convert it to immortality. Honours, monuments, whatever the ambitious have ordered by decrees or raised in public buildings are soon destroyed: there is nothing that the passage of time does not demolish and remove. But it cannot damage the works which philosophy has consecrated: no age will wipe them out, no age diminish them. The next and every following age will only increase the veneration for them, since envy operates on what is at hand, but we can more openly admire things from a distance. So the life of the philosopher extends widely: he is not confined by the same boundary as are others. He alone is free from the laws that limit the human race, and all ages serve him as though he were a god. Some time has passed: he grasps it in his recollection. Time is present:

he uses it. Time is to come: he anticipates it. This combination of all times into one gives him a long life.

But life is very short and anxious for those who forget the past, neglect the present, and fear the future. When they come to the end of it, the poor wretches realize too late that for all this time they have been preoccupied in doing nothing. And the fact that they sometimes invoke death is no proof that their lives seem long. Their own folly afflicts them with restless emotions which hurl themselves upon the very things they fear: they often long for death because they fear it. Nor is this a proof that they are living for a long time that the day often seems long to them, or that they complain that the hours pass slowly until the time fixed for dinner arrives. For as soon as their preoccupations fail them, they are restless with nothing to do, not knowing how to dispose of their leisure or make the time pass. And so they are anxious for something else to do, and all the intervening time is wearisome: really, it is just as when a gladiatorial show has been announced, or they are looking forward to the appointed time of some other exhibition or amusement – they want to leap over the days in between. Any deferment of the longed-for event is tedious to them. Yet the time of the actual enjoyment is short and swift, and made much shorter through their own fault. For they dash from one pleasure to another and cannot stay steady in one desire. Their days are not long but odious: on the other hand, how short do the nights seem which they spend drinking or sleeping with harlots! Hence the lunacy of the poets, who encourage human frailty by their stories in which Jupiter, seduced by the pleasures

of love-making, is seen to double the length of the night. What else is it but to inflame our vices when they quote the gods to endorse them, and as a precedent for our failings they offer – and excuse – the wantonness of the gods? Can the nights, which they purchase so dearly, not seem much too short to these people? They lose the day in waiting for the night, and the night in fearing the dawn.

Even their pleasures are uneasy and made anxious by various fears, and at the very height of their rejoicing the worrying thought steals over them: 'How long will this last?' This feeling has caused kings to bewail their power, and they were not so much delighted by the greatness of their fortune as terrified by the thought of its inevitable end. When that most arrogant king of Persia* was deploying his army over vast plains, and could not number it but had to measure it, he wept because in a hundred years out of that huge army not a soul would be alive. But he who was weeping was the very man who would bring their fate upon them, and would destroy some on the sea, some on land, some in battle, some in flight, and in a very short time would wipe out all those for whose hundredth year he was afraid.

And what of the fact that even their joys are uneasy? The reason is that they are not based on firm causes, but they are agitated as groundlessly as they arise. But what kind of times can those be, do you think, which they themselves admit are wretched, since even the joys by

* Xerxes.

which they are exalted and raised above humanity are pretty corrupt? All the greatest blessings create anxiety, and Fortune is never less to be trusted than when it is fairest. To preserve prosperity we need other prosperity, and to support the prayers which have turned out well we have to make other prayers. Whatever comes our way by chance is unsteady, and the higher it rises the more liable it is to fall. Furthermore, what is doomed to fall delights no one. So it is inevitable that life will be not just very short but very miserable for those who acquire by great toil what they must keep by greater toil. They achieve what they want laboriously; they possess what they have achieved anxiously; and meanwhile they take no account of time that will never more return. New preoccupations take the place of the old, hope excites more hope and ambition more ambition. They do not look for an end to their misery, but simply change the reason for it. We have found our own public honours a torment, and we spend more time on someone else's. We have stopped labouring as candidates, and we start canvassing for others. We have given up the troubles of a prosecutor, and taken on those of a judge. A man stops being a judge and becomes president of a court. He has grown old in the job of managing the property of others for a salary, and then spends all his time looking after his own. Marius was released from army life to become busy in the consulship. Quintius hastens to get through his dictatorship, but he will be summoned back to it from the plough. Scipio will go against the Carthaginians before he is experienced enough for such an undertaking. Victorious over Hannibal, victorious over Antiochus,

distinguished in his own consulship and a surety for his brother's, if he had not himself forbidden it he would have been set up beside Jupiter. But discord in the state will harass its saviour, and after as a young man he has scorned honours fit for the gods, at length when old he will take delight in an ostentatiously stubborn exile. There will always be causes for anxiety, whether due to prosperity or to wretchedness. Life will be driven on through a succession of preoccupations: we shall always long for leisure, but never enjoy it.

And so, my dear Paulinus, extract yourself from the crowd, and as you have been storm-tossed more than your age deserves, you must at last retire into a peaceful harbour. Consider how many waves you have encountered, how many storms – some of which you have sustained in private life and some you have brought upon yourself in public life. Your virtue has for long enough been shown, when you were a model of active industry: try how it will manage in leisure. The greater part of your life, certainly the better part, has been devoted to the state: take some of your own time for yourself too. I am not inviting you to idle or purposeless sloth, or to drown all your natural energy in sleep and the pleasures that are dear to the masses. That is not to have repose. When you are retired and enjoying peace of mind, you will find to keep you busy more important activities than all those you have performed so energetically up to now. Indeed, you are managing the accounts of the world as scrupulously as you would another person's, as carefully as your own, as conscientiously as the state's. You are winning affection in a job in which

it is hard to avoid ill-will; but believe me it is better to understand the balance-sheet of one's own life than of the corn trade. You must recall that vigorous mind of yours, supremely capable of dealing with the greatest responsibilities, from a task which is certainly honourable but scarcely suited to the happy life; and you must consider that all your youthful training in the liberal studies was not directed to this end, that many thousands of measures of corn might safely be entrusted to you. You had promised higher and greater things of yourself. There will not be wanting men who are completely worthy and hard-working. Stolid pack-animals are much more fit for carrying loads than thoroughbred horses: who ever subdued their noble speed with a heavy burden? Consider too how much anxiety you have in submitting yourself to such a weight of responsibility: you are dealing with the human belly. A hungry people neither listens to reason nor is mollified by fair treatment or swayed by any appeals. Quite recently, within a few days after Gaius Caesar died – still feeling very upset (if the dead have feelings) because he saw that the Roman people were still surviving, with a supply of food for seven or at most eight days, while he was building bridges with boats and playing with the resources of the empire – we faced the worst of all afflictions, even to those under siege, a shortage of provisions. His imitation of a mad foreign king doomed in his pride, nearly cost the city destruction and famine and the universal collapse that follows famine. What then must those have felt who had charge of the corn supply, when they were threatened with stones, weapons, fire – and Gaius? With

a huge pretence they managed to conceal the great evil lurking in the vitals of the state – and assuredly they had good reason. For certain ailments must be treated while the patient is unaware of them: knowing about their disease has caused the death of many.

You must retire to these pursuits which are quieter, safer and more important. Do you think it is the same thing whether you are overseeing the transfer of corn into granaries, unspoilt by the dishonesty and carelessness of the shippers, and taking care that it does not get damp and then ruined through heat, and that it tallies in measure and weight; or whether you take up these sacred and lofty studies, from which you will learn the substance of god, and his will, his mode of life, his shape; what fate awaits your soul; where nature lays us to rest when released from our bodies; what is the force which supports all the heaviest elements of this world at the centre, suspends the light elements above, carries fire to the highest part, and sets the stars in motion with their proper changes – and learn other things in succession which are full of tremendous marvels? You really should leave the ground and turn your thoughts to these studies. Now while the blood is hot you should make your way with vigour to better things. In this kind of life you will find much that is worth your study: the love and practice of the virtues, forgetfulness of the passions, the knowledge of how to live and die, and a life of deep tranquillity.

Indeed the state of all who are preoccupied is wretched, but the most wretched are those who are toiling not even at their own preoccupations, but must regulate their sleep by another's, and their walk by

another's pace, and obey orders in those freest of all things, loving and hating. If such people want to know how short their lives are, let them reflect how small a portion is their own.

So, when you see a man repeatedly wearing the robe of office, or one whose name is often spoken in the Forum, do not envy him: these things are won at the cost of life. In order that one year may be dated from their names they will waste all their own years. Life has left some men struggling at the start of their careers before they could force their way to the height of their ambition. Some men, after they have crawled through a thousand indignities to the supreme dignity, have been assailed by the gloomy thought that all their labours were but for the sake of an epitaph. Some try to adjust their extreme old age to new hopes as though it were youth, but find its weakness fails them in the midst of efforts that overtax it. It is a shameful sight when an elderly man runs out of breath while he is pleading in court for litigants who are total strangers to him, and trying to win the applause of the ignorant bystanders. It is disgraceful to see a man collapsing in the middle of his duties, worn out more by his life-style than by his labours. Disgraceful too is it when a man dies in the midst of going through his accounts, and his heir, long kept waiting, smiles in relief. I cannot resist telling you of an instance that occurs to me. Sextus Turannius was an old man known to be scrupulous and diligent, who, when he was ninety, at his own request was given retirement from his office by Gaius Caesar. He then ordered himself to be laid out on his bed and lamented by the assembled

household as though he were dead. The house bewailed its old master's leisure, and did not cease its mourning until his former job was restored to him. Is it really so pleasant to die in harness? That is the feeling of many people: their desire for their work outlasts their ability to do it. They fight against their own bodily weakness, and they regard old age as a hardship on no other grounds than that it puts them on the shelf. The law does not make a man a soldier after fifty or a senator after sixty: men find it more difficult to gain leisure from themselves than from the law. Meanwhile, as they rob and are robbed, as they disturb each other's peace, as they make each other miserable, their lives pass without satisfaction, without pleasure, without mental improvement. No one keeps death in view, no one refrains from hopes that look far ahead; indeed, some people even arrange things that are beyond life – massive tombs, dedications of public buildings, shows for their funerals, and ostentatious burials. But in truth, such people's funerals should be conducted with torches and wax tapers, as though they had lived the shortest of lives.

Consolation to Helvia

Dearest mother, I have often had the urge to console you and often restrained it. Many things encouraged me to venture to do so. First, I thought I would be laying aside all my troubles when I had at least wiped away your tears, even if I could not stop them coming. Then, I did not doubt that I would have more power to raise you up if I had first risen myself. Moreover, I was afraid that though Fortune was conquered by me she might conquer someone close to me. So, staunching my own cut with my hand I was doing my best to crawl forward to bind up your wounds. There were, on the other hand, considerations which delayed my purpose. I realized that your grief should not be intruded upon while it was fresh and agonizing, in case the consolations themselves should rouse and inflame it: for an illness too nothing is more harmful than premature treatment. So I was waiting until your grief of itself should lose its force and, being softened by time to endure remedies, it would allow itself to be touched and handled. Moreover, although I consulted all the works written by the most famous authors to control and moderate grief, I couldn't find any example of someone who had comforted his own dear ones when he himself was the subject of their grief. So in this unprecedented situation I hesitated, fearing that I would be offering not consolation but

further irritation. Consider, too, that a man lifting his head from the very funeral pyre must need some novel vocabulary not drawn from ordinary everyday condolence to comfort his own dear ones. But every great and overpowering grief must take away the capacity to choose words, since it often stifles the voice itself. Anyway, I'll try my best, not trusting in my cleverness, but because being myself the comforter I can thereby be the most effective comfort. As you never refused me anything I hope you will not refuse me this at least (though all grief is stubborn), to be willing that I should set a limit to your desolation.

Consider how much I have promised myself from your indulgence. I don't doubt that I shall have more influence over you than your grief, than which nothing has more influence over the wretched. So in order not to join battle with it at once, I'll first support it and offer it a lot of encouragement: I shall expose and reopen all the wounds which have already healed. Someone will object: 'What kind of consolation is this, to bring back forgotten ills and to set the mind in view of all its sorrows when it can scarcely endure one?' But let him consider that those disorders which are so dangerous that they have gained ground in spite of treatment can generally be treated by opposite methods. Therefore I shall offer to the mind all its sorrows, all its mourning garments: this will not be a gentle prescription for healing, but cautery and the knife. What shall I achieve? That a soul which has conquered so many miseries will be ashamed to worry about one more wound in a body which already has so many scars. So let those people go on weeping

and wailing whose self-indulgent minds have been weakened by long prosperity, let them collapse at the threat of the most trivial injuries; but let those who have spent all their years suffering disasters endure the worst afflictions with a brave and resolute staunchness. Everlasting misfortune does have one blessing, that it ends up by toughening those whom it constantly afflicts.

Fortune has given you no respite from the most woeful sorrows, not even excepting the day of your birth. As soon as you were born, no, even while being born, you lost your mother, and on the threshold of life you were in a sense exposed. You grew up under the care of a stepmother, and you actually forced her to become a real mother by showing her all the deference and devotion which can be seen even in a daughter. Yet even having a good stepmother costs every child a good deal. You lost your uncle, kindest, best and bravest of men, when you were awaiting his arrival; and lest Fortune should lessen her cruelty by dividing it, within a month you buried your dearest husband by whom you had three children. This sorrow was announced to you when you were already grieving, and when indeed all your children were away, as if your misfortunes were concentrated on purpose into that time so that your grief would have nowhere to turn for relief. I pass over all the dangers, all the fears you endured as they assailed you unceasingly. But recently into the same lap from which you had let go three grandchildren you received back the bones of three grandchildren. Within twenty days of burying my son, who died as you held and kissed him,

you heard that I had been taken away. This only you had lacked – to grieve for the living.

Of all the wounds which have ever pierced your body this last one is, I admit, the worst. It has not simply broken the skin but cut into your breast and vital parts. But just as recruits, even when superficially wounded, cry aloud and dread being handled by doctors more than the sword, while veterans, even if severely wounded, patiently and without a groan allow their wounds to be cleaned as though their bodies did not belong to them; so you must now offer yourself bravely for treatment. Come, put away wailings and lamentations and all the other usual noisy manifestations of feminine grief. For all your sorrows have been wasted on you if you have not yet learned how to be wretched. Do I seem to have dealt boldly with you? I have kept away not one of your misfortunes from you, but piled them all up in front of you.

I have done this courageously for I decided to conquer your grief, not to cheat it. But I shall do this, I think, first of all if I show that I am suffering nothing for which I could be called wretched, let alone make my relations wretched; then if I turn to you and show that your fortune, which is wholly dependent on mine, is also not painful.

First I shall deal with the fact, which your love is longing to hear, that I am suffering no affliction. I shall make it clear, if I can, that those very circumstances which you think are crushing me can be borne; but if you cannot believe that, at least I shall be more pleased with myself for being happy in conditions which nor-

mally make men wretched. There is no need to believe others about me: I am telling you firmly that I am not wretched, so that you won't be agitated by uncertainty. To reassure you further, I shall add that I cannot even be made wretched.

We are born under circumstances that would be favourable if we did not abandon them. It was nature's intention that there should be no need of great equipment for a good life: every individual can make himself happy. External goods are of trivial importance and without much influence in either direction: prosperity does not elevate the sage and adversity does not depress him. For he has always made the effort to rely as much as possible on himself and to derive all delight from himself. So what? Am I calling myself a sage? Certainly not. For if I could claim that, not only would I be denying that I was wretched but I would be asserting that I was the most fortunate of all men and coming close to god. As it is, doing what is sufficient to alleviate all wretchedness, I have surrendered myself to wise men, and as I am not yet strong enough to help myself I have gone over to another camp – I mean those who can easily protect themselves and their followers. They have ordered me to take a firm stand, like a sentry on guard, and to foresee all the attacks and all the onslaughts of Fortune long before they hit me. She falls heavily on those to whom she is unexpected; the man who is always expecting her easily withstands her. For an enemy's arrival too scatters those whom it catches off guard; but those who have prepared in advance for the coming conflict, being properly drawn up and equipped, easily

withstand the first onslaught, which is the most violent. Never have I trusted Fortune, even when she seemed to offer peace. All those blessings which she kindly bestowed on me – money, public office, influence – I relegated to a place whence she could claim them back without bothering me. I kept a wide gap between them and me, with the result that she has taken them away, not torn them away. No man has been shattered by the blows of Fortune unless he was first deceived by her favours. Those who loved her gifts as if they were their own for ever, who wanted to be admired on account of them, are laid low and grieve when the false and transient pleasures desert their vain and childish minds, ignorant of every stable pleasure. But the man who is not puffed up in good times does not collapse either when they change. His fortitude is already tested and he maintains a mind unconquered in the face of either condition: for in the midst of prosperity he has tried his own strength against adversity. So I have never believed that there was any genuine good in the things which everyone prays for; what is more, I have found them empty and daubed with showy and deceptive colours, with nothing inside to match their appearance. And now in these so-called evils I find nothing so terrible and harsh as the general opinion threatened. Certainly the word 'exile' itself now enters the ears more harshly through a sort of conviction and popular belief, and strikes the listener as something gloomy and detestable. For that is the people's verdict, but wise men on the whole reject the people's decrees.

So, putting aside this judgement of the majority who

are carried away by the surface appearance of things, whatever the grounds for believing in it, let us examine the reality of exile. Clearly a change of place. I must not seem to restrict its force and remove its worst feature, so I agree that this change of place brings with it the disadvantages of poverty, disgrace and contempt. I shall deal with these later; meanwhile I wish first to examine what distress the change of place itself involves.

'It is unbearable to be deprived of your country.' Come now, look at this mass of people whom the buildings of huge Rome can scarcely hold: most of that crowd are deprived of their country. They have flocked together from their towns and colonies, in fact from the whole world, some brought by ambition, some by the obligation of public office, some by the duties of an envoy, some by self-indulgence seeking a place conveniently rich in vice, some by a love of liberal studies, some by the public shows; some have been attracted by friendship, some by their own energy which has found a wide field for displaying its qualities; some have come to sell their beauty, others their eloquence. Absolutely every type of person has hastened into the city which offers high rewards for both virtues and vices. Take a roll-call of all of them and ask each where he comes from: you will see that most of them have left their own homes and come to a very great and beautiful city, but not their own. Then move away from this city, which in a way can be said to belong to all, and go around all the others: in every one a large proportion of the population is immigrant. Pass on from those whose lovely and convenient position attracts large numbers,

and review deserted places and rocky islands, Sciathus and Seriphus, Gyara and Cossura: you will find no place of exile where somebody does not linger because he wants to. What could be found so bare and with such a steep drop on every side as this rock? What more barren regarding its resources? What more savage regarding its people? What more rugged regarding its geography? What more intemperate regarding its climate? Yet more foreigners than natives live here. Thus, so far is change of locality itself from being a hardship that even this place has enticed some people from their homeland. I've come across people who say that there is a sort of inborn restlessness in the human spirit and an urge to change one's abode; for man is endowed with a mind which is changeable and unsettled: nowhere at rest, it darts about and directs its thoughts to all places known and unknown, a wanderer which cannot endure repose and delights chiefly in novelty. This will not surprise you if you consider its original source. It was not made from heavy, earthly material, but came down from that heavenly spirit: but heavenly things are by nature always in motion, fleeing and driven on extremely fast. Look at the planets which light up the world: not one is at rest. The sun glides constantly, moving on from place to place, and although it revolves with the universe its motion is nevertheless opposite to that of the firmament itself: it races through all the signs of the zodiac and never stops; its motion is everlasting as it journeys from one point to another. All the planets forever move round and pass by: as the constraining law of nature has ordained they are borne from point of point. When

through fixed periods of years they have completed their courses they will start again upon their former circuits. How silly then to imagine that the human mind, which is formed of the same elements as divine beings, objects to movement and change of abode, while the divine nature finds delight and even self-preservation in continual and very rapid change.

Well, now, turn your attention from heavenly to human matters and you will see that whole nations and peoples have changed their abode. What are Greek cities doing in the midst of barbarian territories? Why do we hear the Macedonian language among Indians and Persians? Scythia and all that wide region of fierce and untamed tribes reveal Achaean cities established on the shores of the Pontus. People were not put off from migrating there by the endlessly severe winter or the savage character of the natives which matched their climate. There is a crowd of Athenians in Asia; Miletus has sent out all over the place enough people to colonize seventy-five cities; the whole of the Italian coast which is washed by the lower sea was once Greater Greece. Asia claims the Etruscans as her own; Tyrians live in Africa, Phoenicians in Spain; Greeks penetrated into Gaul and Gauls into Greece; the Pyrenees did not block the passage of the Germans – through trackless, through unknown territory has ventured the restlessness of men, and behind them came their wives and children and parents stricken in years. Some of them, driven about in their long wanderings, did not choose their goal deliberately, but through weariness settled at the nearest place; others by force of arms established their right in a foreign

country. Some tribes were drowned while they sought unknown regions; others settled where they were stranded by running out of supplies. They did not all have the same reason for abandoning one homeland for another. Some, escaping the destruction of their cities by enemy attack, were driven to other territory when they lost their own; some were banished by civil strife; others were sent out to relieve the burden of overpopulation; others fled from disease or constant earthquakes or some intolerable deficiencies in their barren soil; others were tempted by the exaggerated report of a fertile shore. Different reasons roused different peoples to leave their homes; but this at least is clear, nothing has stayed where it was born. The human race is always on the move: in so large a world there is every day some change – new cities are founded, and new names of nations are born as former ones disappear or are absorbed into a stronger one. But what else are all these national migrations than banishments of a people? Why should I drag you through the whole cycle? Why bother to mention Antenor who founded Patavium, and Evander who settled the Arcadian kingdom on the banks of the Tiber? What about Diomedes and the others, both conquerors and conquered, who were scattered over alien lands by the Trojan War? Why, the Roman empire itself looks back to an exile as its founder, a man who was driven out when his homeland was captured and, taking a few survivors, was forced by fear of the victor to make a long journey which brought him to Italy. What a number of colonies this people in turn has sent out to every province! – wherever the Romans have conquered they dwell.

People volunteered for this kind of emigration, and even old men leaving their altars followed the settlers overseas. The point does not need any more illustration, but I will just add one which hits you in the eye: this island itself has often changed its inhabitants. To leave aside earlier events which are obscured by antiquity, the Greeks who now live in Massilia after leaving Phocis first settled in this island. It is not clear what drove them from it, whether the harsh climate, or being in sight of the superior power of Italy, or the lack of harbours. For clearly the reason was not the savagery of the inhabitants, since they settled among what were then the fiercest and most uncivilized peoples in Gaul. Subsequently the Ligurians crossed over to the island, and the Spaniards too, as is clear from the similarity of their customs: for the Corsicans wear the same kind of head-covering and shoes as the Cantabrians, and some of their words are the same – only some, for their language as a whole, through association with Greeks and Ligurians, has lost its native elements. Next, two colonies of Roman citizens were brought there, one by Marius and one by Sulla: so often has the population of this barren and thorny rock changed! In a word, you will hardly find a single country still inhabited by its original natives: everywhere the people are of mixed and imported stock. One group has followed another: one longed for what another scorned; one was driven out from where he had expelled others. So fate has decreed that nothing maintains the same condition forever.

To compensate for the actual change of place and forgetting about the other inconveniences attached to

exile, Varro, most learned of Romans, considers we have this sufficient remedy, that wherever we come we have the same order of nature to deal with. Marcus Brutus thinks this is enough, that exiles can carry with them their own virtues. Even if anyone thinks that these points taken separately are insufficient to console the exile, he will admit that in combination they carry great weight. For how little have we lost, when the two finest things of all will accompany us wherever we go, universal nature and our individual virtue. Believe me, this was the intention of whoever formed the universe, whether all-powerful god, or incorporeal reason creating mighty works, or divine spirit penetrating all things from greatest to smallest with even pressure, or fate and the unchanging sequence of causation – this, I say, was the intention, that only the most worthless of our possessions should come into the power of another. Whatever is best for a human being lies outside human control: it can be neither given nor taken away. The world you see, nature's greatest and most glorious creation, and the human mind which gazes and wonders at it, and is the most splendid part of it, these are our own everlasting possessions and will remain with us as long as we ourselves remain. So, eager and upright, let us hasten with bold steps wherever circumstances take us, and let us journey through any countries whatever: there can be no place of exile within the world since nothing within the world is alien to men. From whatever point on the earth's surface you look up to heaven the same distance lies between the realms of gods and men. Accordingly, provided my eyes are not withdrawn from that spectacle, of which they never tire;

provided I may look upon the sun and the moon and gaze at the other planets; provided I may trace their risings and settings, their periods and the causes of their travelling faster or slower; provided I may behold all the stars that shine at night – some fixed, others not travelling far afield but circling within the same area; some suddenly shooting forth, and others dazzling the eye with scattered fire, as if they are falling, or gliding past with a long trail of blazing light; provided I can commune with these and, so far as humans may, associate with the divine, and provided I can keep my mind always directed upwards, striving for a vision of kindred things – what does it matter what ground I stand on?

'But this country is not fertile in lush or fruitful trees; no large and navigable rivers irrigate it with their channels; it produces nothing which other nations want, being scarcely fertile enough to support its own inhabitants. No valuable marble is quarried here, no veins of gold and silver are mined.' Petty is the mind which delights in earthly things: it should be led away to those things which appear everywhere equally, everywhere equally lustrous. There is this too to consider, that earthly things stand in the way of genuine goods through a wayward belief in false goods. The longer people extend their colonnades, the higher they build their towers, the wider they stretch their walks, the deeper they dig their summer grottoes, the more massively they raise the roofs of their dining-halls, so much the more will there be to cut off the sight of heaven. Fate has cast you into a land where the most luxurious shelter is a hut. Truly you have a petty spirit which meanly comforts itself, if you

put up with this bravely because you know about the hut of Romulus. Say rather 'This humble shack gives shelter, I suppose, to the virtues. Soon it will be more elegant than any temple when justice is seen to be there, and temperance, wisdom, piety, a system for the right allotment of all duties, and the knowledge of man and god. No place is narrow which can hold this assembly of such great virtues; no exile is burdensome when you can have this company with you.'

In his treatise 'On Virtue' Brutus says that he saw Marcellus in exile at Mytilene, living as happily as human nature allows, and never more keen on liberal studies than at that time. And so he adds that when he was about to return without Marcellus, he himself seemed to be going into exile rather than leaving the other in exile. How much more fortunate was Marcellus at that time when he won the favour of Brutus for his exile than when he won the favour of the state for his consulship! What a man that was who caused someone to feel himself an exile because he was leaving an exile behind! What a man he was to have won the admiration of a man whom even his kinsman Cato had to admire! Brutus also says that Gaius Caesar had sailed past Mytilene because he could not bear the sight of a great man in disgrace. Indeed, the senate obtained his recall by public petition: they were so anxious and sorrowful that they all seemed to share Brutus' feelings on that day, and to be pleading not for Marcellus but for themselves, in case they would be exiled if deprived of him. But he achieved much more on that day when Brutus could not bear to leave, nor Caesar to see, him in exile. For both gave him

testimony: Brutus grieved to return without Marcellus, and Caesar blushed. Can you doubt that Marcellus, being the great man he was, often encouraged himself thus to endure his exile with equanimity? 'Being without your country is not misery: you have thoroughly taught yourself by your studies to know that to a wise man every place is his country. Besides, was not the man who caused your exile himself absent from his country for ten consecutive years? No doubt the reason was to enlarge his domains – yet he certainly was absent. See, now he is summoned to Africa which is full of threats of further war; to Spain which is reviving its forces shattered by defeat; to treacherous Egypt – in short to the whole world which is watchful for an opportunity against the stricken empire. Which problem shall he face first? To which quarter take his stand? His own victorious course will drive him throughout the world. Let the nations honour and worship him; live yourself content with Brutus as your admirer.'

Well did Marcellus, then, endure his exile, nor did his change of abode cause any change at all in his mind though poverty attended it. But there is no evil in poverty, as anyone knows who has not yet arrived at the lunatic state of greed and luxury, which ruin everything. For how little is needed to support a man! And who can lack this if he has any virtue at all? As far as I am concerned, I know that I have lost not wealth but distractions. The body's needs are few: it wants to be free from cold, to banish hunger and thirst with nourishment; if we long for anything more we are exerting ourselves to serve our vices, not our needs. We do not need to scour

every ocean, or to load our bellies with the slaughter of animals, or to pluck shellfish from the unknown shores of the furthest sea. May gods and goddesses destroy those whose luxury passes the bounds of an empire that already awakens envy. They seek to stock their pretentious kitchens by hunting beyond the Phasis, and they aren't ashamed to ask for birds from the Parthians, from whom we have not yet exacted vengeance. From all sides they collect everything familiar to a fastidious glutton. From the furthest sea is brought food which their stomachs, weakened by a voluptuous diet, can scarcely receive. They vomit in order to eat, and eat in order to vomit, and banquets for which they ransack the whole world they do not even deign to digest. If someone despises all that, what harm can poverty do him? If he longs for it, poverty even does him good: for against his will he is being cured, and if even under compulsion he does not take his medicine, for a time at least his inability to have those things looks like unwillingness. Gaius Caesar, whom I think nature produced as an example of the effect of supreme wickedness in a supreme position, dined in one day at a cost of ten million sesterces; and though helped in this by everyone's ingenuity he could scarcely discover how to spend the tribute from three provinces on one dinner. Poor wretches, whose appetite is only tempted by expensive foods! Yet it is not an exquisite taste or some delightful effect on the palate that makes them expensive, but their scarcity and the difficulty of procuring them. Otherwise, if these people would agree to return to good sense, where is the need for all these skills that serve the belly? What need for

importing, or laying waste the woodlands, or ransacking the ocean? All around food lies ready which nature has distributed in every place; but men pass it by as though blind to it, and they scour every country, they cross the seas, and they whet their appetite at great expense when at little cost they could satisfy it. I want to say to them: 'Why do you launch your ships? Why do you arm your bands against both beasts and men? Why do you tear around in such a panic? Why do you pile wealth upon wealth? You really must consider how small your bodies are. Is it not madness and the worst form of derangement to want so much though you can hold so little? Therefore, though you may increase your income and extend your estates, you will never increase the capacity of your bodies. Though your business may do well and warfare bring you profit, though you hunt down and gather your food from every side, you will not have anywhere to store your supplies. Why do you seek out so many things? To be sure, our ancestors were unhappy, whose virtue even now props up our vices, who procured their food with their own hands, who slept on the ground, whose dwellings did not yet glitter with gold nor their temples with precious stones – and so in those days they swore solemn oaths by gods of clay and, having invoked them, returned to the enemy to certain death rather than break their word. To be sure, our dictator who gave audience to the Samnite envoys while with his own hand he cooked the simplest sort of food (the hand which already had frequently smitten the enemy and placed a laurel wreath on the lap of Capitoline Jupiter) – he lived less happily than Apicius in our time, who in the city from

which philosophers were once banished as corrupters of the youth, polluted the age by his teaching as professor of cookery.' It is worth hearing what happened to him. When he had spent a hundred million sesterces in his kitchen, when he had drunk up at every one of his carousals all those imperial gifts and the enormous revenue of the Capitol, then for the first time he was forced by the weight of his debts to look into his accounts. He reckoned he would have ten million sesterces left, and that living on ten million would be starvation: so he poisoned himself. What luxury, if ten million meant poverty! How then can you think that it is the amount of money that matters and not the attitude of mind? Someone dreaded having ten million, and what others pray for he escaped by poison. But indeed for a man of such perverted mentality that last drink was the best thing for him. It was when he was not merely enjoying but boasting of his huge banquets, when he was making a display of his vices, when he was drawing public attention to his vulgar displays, when he was tempting young people to imitate him (who even without bad examples are naturally impressionable) – then it was that he was really eating and drinking poisons. Such is the fate of those who measure wealth not by the standard of reason, whose limits are fixed, but by that of a vicious life-style governed by boundless, uncontrollable caprice. Nothing satisfies greed, but even a little satisfies nature. So an exile's poverty brings no hardship; for no place of exile is so barren that it cannot abundantly support a man.

'But,' says someone, 'the exile is going to miss his clothes and home.' These too he will miss only as far as

he needs them – and he will lack neither house nor covering; for the body needs as little for protection as for food. Nature has not made any of man's essentials laborious as well. But he must have richly dyed purple clothes, woven with gold thread and decorated with multicoloured patterns: it is his fault, not nature's, if he feels poor. Even if you give him back all he has lost, you'll be wasting your time; for once he is back from exile he will feel a greater lack compared with his desires than he felt as an exile compared with his former possessions. But he must have furniture gleaming with gold vessels and antique silver plate wrought by famous artists, bronze made valuable because a few lunatics want it, a crowd of slaves which would throng a house however large, beasts of burden with bodies bloated with force-feeding, marbles from every land: though he piles all these up, they will never sate his insatiable soul; just as no amount of fluid will satisfy one whose craving arises not from lack of water but from burning internal fever: for that is not a thirst but a disease. Nor is this true only of money or food: the same feature is found in every desire which arises not from a lack but from a vice. However much you heap up for it will not mark the end of greed, only a stage in it. So the man who restrains himself within the bounds set by nature will not notice poverty; the man who exceeds these bounds will be pursued by poverty however rich he is. Life's necessities are found even in places of exile, superfluities not even in kingdoms. It is the mind that creates our wealth, and this goes with us into exile, and in the harshest desert places it finds sufficient to nourish the body and revels

in the enjoyment of its own goods. Money in no way concerns the mind any more than it concerns the gods. All those things which are revered by minds untaught and enslaved to their bodies – marble, gold, silver, great round polished tables – are earthly burdens which a soul pure and conscious of its nature cannot love: for it is light and unencumbered, and destined to soar aloft whenever it is released from the body. Meanwhile, so far as it is not hampered by our limbs and this heavy burden that envelops us, it surveys things divine with swift and winged thought. So the soul can never suffer exile, being free and akin to the gods and equal to all the universe and all time. For its thought encompasses the whole of heaven, and journeys into all past and future time. This wretched body, the chain and prison of the soul, is tossed hither and thither; upon it punishment and pillage and disease wreak havoc: but the soul itself is holy and eternal, and it cannot be assailed with violence.

In case you think I am simply using the teaching of philosophers to make light of the trials of poverty, which no one feels to be a burden unless he thinks it that, first consider that by far the greater proportion of men are poor, but you will not see them looking at all more gloomy and anxious than the rich. In fact, I rather suspect that they are happier in proportion as their minds have less to harry them. Let us pass on to the rich: how frequently are they just like the poor! When they travel abroad their luggage is restricted, and whenever they are forced to hasten their journey they dismiss their retinue of attendants. When they are serving in the army, how little of their belongings do they keep with them, since

camp discipline forbids any luxury! Nor is it only special conditions of time and place which put them on a level with the poor in their needs: when on occasion they get tired of their riches they choose certain days on which they dine on the ground and, putting aside their gold and silver vessels, use earthenware ones. What lunatics, to covet sometimes a condition they always dread! What mental darkness, what ignorance of the truth blinds those who, though afflicted by the fear of poverty, yet take pleasure in imitating it! For my part, whenever I look back at the fine examples of antiquity, I am ashamed to find consolations for poverty, since the luxury of the times has reached the point where an exile's allowance is more than the inheritance of leading men of old. We all know that Homer had one slave, Plato had three, and Zeno, the founder of the strict and manly Stoic philosophy, had none. Will anyone on that account say that they lived wretchedly without himself seeming to all by his words to be utterly wretched? Menenius Agrippa, who kept the public peace by acting as mediator between patricians and plebeians, was buried by public subscription. Atilius Regulus, while he was routing the Carthaginians in Africa, wrote to tell the senate that his hired worker had gone off and abandoned his farm: the senate voted that during Regulus' absence the farm should be managed by the state. Was it not worth being without a slave so that the Roman people might become his tenant? Scipio's daughters received a dowry from the state treasury because their father had left them nothing: assuredly it was right for the Roman people to offer tribute to Scipio once, since he was always exacting it

from Carthage. Happy were the girls' husbands whose father-in-law was the Roman people! Do you think those whose pantomime actresses marry with a dowry of a million sesterces are happier than Scipio, whose children had the senate for their guardian and received solid copper money as a dowry? Could anyone despise poverty with a pedigree so distinguished? Could an exile resent lacking anything, when Scipio lacked a dowry, Regulus a hired worker, Menenius a funeral: when for all of them supplying their need was all the more honourable simply because they had the need? And so, with these men pleading her cause poverty wins not only acquittal but high esteem.

One might reply, 'Why do you make an artificial separation of those things which can be borne separately but not in combination? You can put up with a change of place if only the place is changed. You can put up with poverty if there is no disgrace, which even alone usually crushes the spirit.' In answer to this man who aims to frighten me by an accumulation of ills, this must be said: 'If you have the strength to tackle any one aspect of misfortune you can tackle all. When once virtue has toughened the mind it renders it invulnerable on every side. If greed, the most overmastering plague of the human race, has relaxed its grip, ambition will not stand in your way. If you regard your last day not as a punishment but as a law of nature, the breast from which you have banished the dread of death no fear will dare to enter. If you consider that sexual desire was given to man not for enjoyment but for the propagation of the race, once you are free of this violent and destructive

passion rooted in your vitals, every other desire will leave you undisturbed. Reason routs the vices not one by one but all together: the victory is final and complete.' Do you think that any wise man can be affected by disgrace, one who relies entirely on himself and holds aloof from common beliefs? A disgraceful death is worse than disgrace: yet Socrates went to prison with the same expression he wore when he once snubbed the Thirty Tyrants – and his presence robbed even prison of disgrace, for where Socrates was could not seem a prison. Who is so blind to the truth that he thinks it was a disgrace to Marcus Cato that he was twice defeated in his bid for the praetorship and consulship? The disgrace belonged to the praetorship and consulship which were being honoured by Cato. No man is despised by another unless he is first despised by himself. An abject and debased mind is susceptible to such insult; but if a man stirs himself to face the worst of disasters and defeats the evils which overwhelm others, then he wears those very sorrows like a sacred badge. For we are naturally disposed to admire more than anything else the man who shows fortitude in adversity. When Aristides was being led to execution at Athens, everyone who met him cast down his eyes and groaned, as though it was not merely a just man but Justice herself who was being punished. Yet one man actually spat in his face. He could have resented this because he knew that only a foul-mouthed man would dare to do it. Instead he wiped his face, and with a smile he said to the magistrate escorting him: 'Warn that fellow not to give such a vulgar yawn another time.' This was to retaliate insult

upon insult. I know some people say that nothing is worse than scorn and that even death seems preferable. To these I shall reply that exile too is often free from any kind of scorn. If a great man falls and remains great as he lies, people no more despise him than they stamp on a fallen temple, which the devout still worship as much as when it was standing.

Dearest mother, since you have no cause on my account to drive you to endless tears it follows that reasons regarding yourself are urging you to weep. Well, there are two: you are bothered either because you seem to have lost some protection, or because you cannot endure the very thought of doing without me.

The first point I must touch upon only slightly, for I know that your heart loves your dear ones for themselves alone. Let those mothers reflect on this who exploit their children's influence with a woman's lack of influence; who, because women cannot hold office, seek power through their sons; who both drain their sons' inheritances and try to get them; who exhaust their sons by lending their eloquence to others. Whereas you have taken the greatest pleasure in your sons' gifts and made the least use of them; you have always set a limit to our generosity without limiting your own; while your father was still alive you actually gave gifts to your wealthy sons; you administered our inheritances as though you were earnestly looking after your own and being scrupulously provident with another's; you were cautious in using our influence, as if it were someone else's, and in our spells in office you had no part except your pleasure and the expenses. Your love never had regard

for self-interest: therefore, now that your son has been taken from you, you cannot feel the lack of those things which you never thought concerned you when he was safe and sound.

I must direct my consolation entirely to that point from which arises the true force of a mother's grief. You say, 'So I am deprived of my dearest son's embrace; I can't enjoy seeing him or talking to him. Where is he whose appearance smoothed my troubled brow, to whom I confided all my woes? Where are our conversations of which I never tired? Where are his studies which I shared with more than a feminine eagerness and more than a mother's intimacy? Where are our meetings? Where is the unfailing boyish glee at the sight of his mother?' To all this you add the actual places where we rejoiced together and socialized, and the reminders of our recent life together which are inevitably the most acute source of mental anguish. For Fortune plotted even this cruel blow against you, that only two days before I was struck down she contrived that you should depart tranquil in mind and fearing no such disaster. It was well that we had lived far apart, and that an absence of some years had prepared you for this blow. By returning you did not gain the pleasure of your son's presence, but you lost the habit of bearing his absence. If you had been away long before you would have borne the loss more bravely, as the very distance between us would have softened the longing. If you had not gone away you would at least have had the final pleasure of seeing your son for two days longer. As it was, cruel fate so arranged it that you could neither be present at my

misfortune nor get used to my absence. But the harsher these circumstances are, the greater the courage you must summon up and the more fiercely you must fight, as with an enemy you know and have often defeated. Your blood has not now flowed from an undamaged body: you have been struck exactly where the old scars are.

You must not excuse yourself as being a woman, who has been virtually given the right to indulge excessively, but not endlessly, in tears. With this in view our ancestors allowed widows to mourn their husbands for ten months, in order to compromise by public decree with the stubbornness of female grief. They did not prohibit mourning but they limited it. For to be afflicted with endless sorrow at the loss of someone very dear is foolish self-indulgence, and to feel none is inhuman callousness. The best compromise between love and good sense is both to feel longing and to conquer it. You must not pay regard to certain women whose grief, once assumed, was ended only by death – you know some who never removed the mourning dress they put on when they lost their sons. Your life was braver from its start and expects more from you: the excuse of being a woman does not apply to one from whom all womanly faults have been absent. That worst evil of our time, unchastity, has not numbered you among the majority of women; neither jewels nor pearls have influenced you; the glitter of wealth has not struck you as the greatest blessing of the human race; you were brought up in a strict, old-fashioned home and never deviated into the imitation of worse women which is dangerous even to good ones;

you were never ashamed of your fertility as if it taunted you with your advancing years; never did you follow other women who seek only to impress by their looks, and hide your pregnancy as if it were an indecent burden, nor did you destroy the hopes of giving birth by abortion; you did not spoil your complexion by paints and cosmetics; you never liked the sort of garment which revealed no more when it was taken off; in you has been seen that matchless ornament, that loveliest beauty which is not dependent on any time of life, that greatest glory of all – modesty. So you cannot, in order to justify your grief, claim the name of woman from which your virtues have set you apart: you ought to be as immune to female tears as to female vices. Not even women will allow you to waste away from your wound, but they will tell you to get your necessary mourning speedily over with and rise again comforted, by willing yourself to keep in mind those women whose conspicuous courage has ranked them with great men. Fortune reduced Cornelia's twelve children to two: if you wanted to count Cornelia's bereavements, she had lost ten; if you wanted to appraise them, she had lost the Gracchi. But when those around her were weeping and cursing her fate she forbad them to accuse Fortune, which had given her the Gracchi as her sons. It was a fitting son of this mother who said in the assembly, 'Would you insult the mother who gave me birth?' Yet his mother's words seem to me much more spirited: the son was proud of the parentage of the Gracchi, the mother of their deaths as well. Rutilia followed her son Cotta into exile, and was so single-minded in her devotion that she preferred exile to miss-

ing him, and returned home only when he did. And when, restored to favour and a distinguished public figure, he died, she bore his loss as bravely as she had shared his exile, nor was she ever seen to weep after his funeral. She showed courage when he was exiled and wisdom when he died; for nothing stopped her showing her love and nothing induced her to persist in useless and unavailing grief. It is with women like these that I want you to be numbered. You always imitated their way of life, and you will best follow their example in controlling and conquering your sorrow.

I know that this is not something which is in our power and that no strong feeling is under our control, least of all that which arises from sorrow: for it is violent and violently resists every remedy. Sometimes we want to crush it and swallow down our groans, but through the pretended composure of our features the tears pour down. Sometimes we divert our mind with public shows or gladiatorial contests, but in the very midst of the distractions of the spectacles it is undermined by some little reminder of its loss. Therefore it is better to conquer our grief than to deceive it. For if it has withdrawn, being merely beguiled by pleasures and preoccupations, it starts up again and from its very respite gains force to savage us. But the grief that has been conquered by reason is calmed for ever. I am not therefore going to prescribe for you those remedies which I know many people have used, that you divert or cheer yourself by a long or pleasant journey abroad, or spend a lot of time carefully going through your accounts and administering your estate, or constantly be involved in some new

activity. All those things help only for a short time; they do not cure grief but hinder it. But I would rather end it than distract it. And so I am leading you to that resource which must be the refuge of all who are flying from Fortune, liberal studies. They will heal your wound, they will withdraw all your melancholy. Even if you had never been familiar with them you would have need of them now. But, so far as the old-fashioned strictness of my father allowed, you have had some acquaintance with the liberal arts, even if you have not mastered them. If only my father, best of men, had been less devoted to ancestral tradition, and had been willing that you be steeped in the teaching of philosophy and not just gain a smattering of it: you would not now have to acquire your defence against Fortune but just bring it forth. He was less inclined to let you pursue your studies because of those women who use books not to acquire wisdom but as the furniture of luxury. Yet thanks to your vigorously inquiring mind you absorbed a lot considering the time you had available: the foundations of all formal studies have been laid. Return now to these studies and they will keep you safe. They will comfort you, they will delight you; and if they genuinely penetrate your mind, never again will grief enter there, or anxiety, or the distress caused by futile and pointless suffering. Your heart will have room for none of these, for to all other failings it has long been closed. Those studies are your most dependable protection, and they alone can snatch you from Fortune's grip.

But until you arrive at this haven which philosophy holds out to you, you must have supports to lean on: so

I want meanwhile to point out your own consolations. Consider my brothers: while they live you have no reason to complain of your fortune. In both you have contrasting virtues to cheer you up: the one achieved public office by his energy, the other in his wisdom despised it. Take comfort in the distinction of the one, the retirement of the other, and the devotion of both. I know the innermost feelings of my brothers. The one fosters his distinction really in order to bring honour to you, while the other has retired into peace and tranquillity in order to have leisure for you. Fortune has done you a service in arranging that your children should bring you both assistance and delight: you can be protected by the distinction of the one and you can enjoy the leisure of the other. They will be rivals in their services to you, and the devotion of two will fill the blank space left by one. I promise you with complete confidence that you will miss nothing but the number of sons.

After these consider too your grandchildren: Marcus, a most charming child – you could not remain sorrowful while looking at him, and no one's heart could suffer anguish too great or too recent not to be soothed by his embrace. Whose tears would his merriment not allay? Whose heart gripped by anxious care would not relax at his lively chatter? Who will not smile at his playfulness? Whose attention, however fixed on his own thoughts, will not be attracted and held by that prattling which no one could tire of? I pray to the gods that he may survive us! May all the cruelty of fate wear itself out and stop at me. Whatever you were destined to suffer as a mother and as a grandmother may I represent. Let the rest of

my family flourish undisturbed. I shall not complain of my childlessness or my exile, if only I prove to be the scapegoat for a family that will suffer no more. Embrace Novatilla, who will soon give you great-grandchildren; I had so attached her to myself and adopted her that in losing me she could seem an orphan, though her father is alive. Cherish her for me too. Fortune recently took away her mother, but your love will mean that she will only grieve over her mother's loss but not suffer for it. Now you must shape and compose her character: teaching sinks more deeply into those of impressionable years. Let her grow used to your conversation and be moulded as you think right; you will be giving her a great deal even if you give her only your example. Such a sacred duty as this will act as a cure for you, for only philosophy or honourable occupation can divert from its anguish a heart whose grief springs from love.

I would reckon your father too among your great comforts if he were not absent. As it is, you must now judge his love for you by your love for him, and you will realize how much more just it is for you to preserve yourself for him than sacrifice yourself for me. Whenever excessive grief attacks you and urges you to give way to it, think of your father. Certainly, by giving him so many grandchildren and great-grandchildren you ceased to be his only offspring; but for him the completion of a happy life depends on you. While he lives it is wrong for you to complain that you have lived.

Up to now I have said nothing about your greatest comfort, your sister, that heart most faithful to you into which are poured unreservedly all your anxieties, that

soul which has been a mother to us all. You mingled your tears with hers; on her bosom you first began to breathe again. Always indeed she shares your feelings, but in my case she grieves not only for you. She carried me in her arms to Rome. During my long illness it was her loving and motherly nursing that brought me round. When I was a candidate for the quaestorship she supported me and, though she normally lacked the confidence even for conversation or a loud greeting, for my sake love conquered shyness. Neither her sheltered manner of living, nor her modesty (old-fashioned when compared with the prevalent brazenness of women), nor her tranquillity, nor her reserved nature which wanted peace and quiet – none of these prevented her from actually becoming ambitious on my behalf. She, dearest mother, is the source of comfort from which you can revive yourself: cling to her as much as you can in the closest embraces. Sorrowers tend to avoid what they are most fond of and try to give vent to their grief; but you must share all your thoughts with her. Whether you wish to keep this mood or lay it aside, you will find in her either the end of your sorrow or one who will share it. But if I know the wisdom of this paragon of women, she will not allow you to be consumed in profitless anguish, and she will tell you of an edifying episode in her life which I also witnessed.

While actually on a sea voyage she lost her beloved husband, my uncle, whom she had married as a maiden; yet she bore simultaneously the burdens of grief and fear and, though shipwrecked, she rode out the storms and brought his body safely ashore. O how many noble deeds

of women are lost in obscurity! If she had chanced to live in the days of old when people frankly admired heroism, how men of genius would have competed to sing the praises of a wife who ignored her physical weakness, ignored the sea which even the bravest must fear, and risked her life to give her husband burial; and while her thoughts were on his funeral had no fears about her own! All the poets have given renown to the woman who offered to die in place of her husband. But this is nobler, to risk one's life to bury one's husband: for that love is greater which wins less through equal danger.

After this it can surprise no one that during the sixteen years her husband governed Egypt she was never seen in public, she received no provincial into her home, she never petitioned her husband for a favour, and she never allowed herself to be petitioned. The result was that a province given to gossip and clever at insulting its rulers, where even those who had avoided wrongdoing did not escape scandal, respected her as a singular pattern of integrity, restrained all licence in its speech (a very difficult achievement where even dangerous witticisms are popular), and even to this day keeps hoping, though it never expects, to see another like her. It would have been a great achievement if she had won the approval of the province for sixteen years; it was even better not to have been noticed there. I do not recall these things in order to list her good qualities (to rehearse them so sketchily is to be unfair to them), but to give you an idea of the high-mindedness of the woman who was not conquered by ambition or greed, those inevitable com-

panions and curses of power; who, facing shipwreck on a disabled boat, was not deterred by the fear of death from clinging to her dead husband and seeking not the means of her own escape but the means of getting his body off for burial. This is the sort of courage you must match, by withdrawing your mind from grief and resolving that no one shall think you regret having had children.

However, whatever you do, inevitably your thoughts will turn to me constantly, and none of your other children will come to your mind more often, not because they are less dear to you but because it is natural to touch more often the part that hurts. So this is how you must think of me – happy and cheerful as if in the best of circumstances. For they are best, since my mind, without any preoccupation, is free for its own tasks, now delighting in more trivial studies, now in its eagerness for the truth rising up to ponder its own nature and that of the universe. It seeks to know first about lands and their location, then the nature of the encompassing sea and its tidal ebb and flow. Then it studies all the awesome expanse which lies between heaven and earth – this nearer space turbulent with thunder, lightning, gales of wind, and falling rain, snow and hail. Finally, having scoured the lower areas it bursts through to the heights and enjoys the noblest sight of divine things and, mindful of its own immortality, it ranges over all that has been and will be throughout all ages.

On Tranquillity of Mind

SERENUS:* When I looked into myself, Seneca, some of my vices appeared clearly on the surface, so that I could lay my hand on them; some were more hidden away in the depths; some were not there all the time but return at intervals. These last I would say are the most troublesome: they are like prowling enemies who pounce on you when occasion offers, and allow you neither to be at the ready as in war nor at ease as in peace. However, the state I most find myself in (for why should I not admit the truth to you as to a doctor?) is that I am not really free of the vices which I feared and hated, though not, on the other hand, subject to them: this puts me in a condition which is not the worst, but an extremely peevish and quarrelsome one – I am neither ill nor well. There is no need for you to say that all virtues are fragile to start with and acquire firmness and strength with time. I know too that those which toil to make a good impression, seeking high rank, for example, and a reputation for eloquence, and whatever depends on the approval of others, take time to mature – both those which offer real strength and those which are tricked out in some sort of dye aimed at popularity have to wait years until the passage of time gradually produces

* A friend of Seneca's.

their colour. But I'm afraid that habit, which induces firmness in things, may drive this fault more deeply into me: long association brings love of evil as well as good.

I cannot show all at once so much as bit by bit the nature of this mental weakness, which wavers between two choices and does not incline strongly either to right or to wrong: I'll tell you what happens to me and you can find a name for the malady. I have a tremendous love of frugality, I must admit. I don't like a couch decked out ostentatiously; or clothes brought out from a chest or given a sheen by the forceful pressure of weights and a thousand mangles, but homely and inexpensive, and not hoarded to be donned with fuss and bother. I like food which is not prepared and watched over by the household slaves, not ordered many days in advance nor served by a multitude of hands, but readily obtainable and easy to deal with, nothing in it out of the way or expensive, available everywhere, not heavy on the purse or the body, and not destined to come back by the same way it entered. I want my servant to be an ordinary, unskilled, home-born slave; my silver to be the heavy ware of my rustic father without any hallmark; and my table to be without flashy variegated markings and not familiar to the whole town through its many changes of fashionable owners, but set up to be used and not to distract any guest's eyes with pleasure or kindle them with envy. But when I have set up these standards I find my mind dazzled by the fine trappings of some training-school for servants, with the slaves more carefully clothed and decked with gold than if they were in a public parade, and a whole army of glittering flunkies;

by a house where you even walk on precious stones, where wealth is scattered in every corner, where the roof itself glitters, and the whole populace deferentially attends the ruin of a family heritage. Need I mention pools clear to their depths which flow around the dinner guests, or banquets worthy of their surroundings? After being long given up to frugality I have found myself surrounded by the lavish splendour of luxury echoing all about me. My vision wavers somewhat, for I can raise my mind to face it more easily than my eyes. And so I come back not a worse but a sadder man; I don't move with my head so high among my trivial possessions; and a secret gnawing doubt undermines me whether that life is superior. None of these things is changing me, but none of them fails to shake me.

I decide to follow my teacher's precepts and busy myself in state affairs; I decide to achieve public office – not, of course, because of the purple robe and the lictors' rods, but so that I can be more ready with help for my friends and relations, for all my fellow-citizens, and then for all mankind. Enthusiastically I follow Zeno, Cleanthes, Chrysippus, of whom, by the way, none entered public life and all urged others to do so. But when something has assailed my mind, which is not used to being battered; when something has happened which either is unworthy of me (a common experience in every human life) or cannot easily be dealt with; when unimportant things become time-consuming; I take refuge in leisure and, just like weary flocks of animals, I make my way more quickly home. I decide to restrict my life within its walls, saying, 'Let no one rob me of a

single day who is not going to make me an adequate return for such a loss. Let my mind be fixed on itself, cultivate itself, have no external interest – nothing that seeks the approval of another; let it cherish the tranquillity that has no part in public or private concerns.' But when my mind is excited by reading a convincing account of something and spurred on by noble examples, I long to rush into the forum, to speak on behalf of one man and offer help to another, which will at least be an attempt to assist even if it does not succeed, or to curb the pride of someone else grown arrogant by success.

In my studies I suppose it must indeed be better to keep my theme firmly in view and speak to this, while allowing the theme to suggest my words and so dictate the course of an unstudied style of speech. 'Where is the need,' I ask, 'to compose something to last for ages? Why not stop trying to prevent posterity being silent about you? You were born to die, and a silent funeral is less bothersome. So if you must fill your time, write something in a simple style for your own use and not for publication: less toil is needed if you study only for the day.' Again, when my mind is lifted up by the greatness of its thoughts, it becomes ambitious for words and longs to match its higher inspiration with its language, and so produces a style that conforms to the impressiveness of the subject matter. Then it is that I forget my rule and principle of restraint, and I am carried too far aloft by a voice no longer my own.

To cut the matter short, this weakness in my good intentions pursues me in every sphere. I fear that I am gradually getting worse, or (which is more worrying)

that I am hanging on an edge like someone always on the point of falling, and that perhaps there is more wrong than I myself can see: for we take too intimate a view of our own characteristics and bias always affects our judgement. I imagine many people could have achieved wisdom if they had not imagined they had already achieved it, if they had not dissembled about some of their own characteristics and turned a blind eye to others. For you have no reason to suppose that we come to grief more through the flattery of others than through our own. Who has dared to tell himself the truth? Who even when surrounded by crowds of toadying sycophants is not his own greatest flatterer? So, I am appealing to you, if you have any cure for this vacillation of mind, to consider me worthy of owing tranquillity to you. I realize that these mental agitations of mine are not dangerous and won't produce a storm. To express my complaint for you in a realistic metaphor, I am harried not by a tempest but by sea-sickness. Whatever my ailment, then, root it out and come to the help of one who is struggling in sight of land.

SENECA: Indeed, Serenus, I have long been silently asking myself to what I should compare such a mental state, and I could find no closer analogy than the condition of those people who have got over a long and serious illness, but are still sometimes mildly affected by onsets of fever and pain, and even when free of the last symptoms are still worried and upset; and, though quite better, offer their hands to doctors and needlessly complain if they feel at all hot. With these people, Serenus, it is not that their bodies are insufficiently healed but

that they are insufficiently used to health, just as even a calm sea will show some ripples, especially when it has subsided following a storm. So what you need is not those more radical remedies which we have now finished with – blocking yourself here, being angry with yourself there, threatening yourself sternly somewhere else – but the final treatment, confidence in yourself and the belief that you are on the right path, and not led astray by the many tracks which cross yours of people who are hopelessly lost, though some are wandering not far from the true path. But what you are longing for is great and supreme and nearly divine – not to be shaken. The Greeks call this steady firmness of mind 'euthymia' (Democritus wrote a good treatise about it), but I call it tranquillity, as there is no need to imitate and reproduce the form of Greek words: the point at issue must be indicated by some term which should have the sense but not the form of the Greek name. We are, therefore, seeking how the mind can follow a smooth and steady course, well disposed to itself, happily regarding its own condition and with no interruption to this pleasure, but remaining in a state of peace with no ups and downs: that will be tranquillity. Let us consider in general how this can be achieved: you will then extract what you like from the communal remedy. Meanwhile the whole failing must be dragged out into the open, where everyone will recognize his own share in it. At the same time you will realize how much less trouble you have with your self-revulsion than those people who, tied to some specious declaration and labouring under an impressive title, are stuck with their own pretence more by shame than by desire.

They are all in the same category, both those who are afflicted with fickleness, boredom and a ceaseless change of purpose, and who always yearn for what they have left behind, and those who just yawn from apathy. There are those too who toss around like insomniacs, and keep changing their position until they find rest through sheer weariness. They keep altering the condition of their lives, and eventually stick to that one in which they are trapped not by weariness with further change but by old age which is too sluggish for novelty. There are those too who suffer not from moral steadfastness but from inertia, and so lack the fickleness to live as they wish, and just live as they have begun. In fact there are innumerable characteristics of the malady, but one effect – dissatisfaction with oneself. This arises from mental instability and from fearful and unfulfilled desires, when men do not dare or do not achieve all they long for, and all they grasp at is hope: they are always unbalanced and fickle, an inevitable consequence of living in suspense. They struggle to gain their prayers by every path, and they teach and force themselves to do dishonourable and difficult things; and when their efforts are unrewarded the fruitless disgrace tortures them, and they regret not the wickedness but the frustration of their desires. Then they are gripped by repentance for their attempt and fear of trying again, and they are undermined by the restlessness of a mind that can discover no outlet, because they can neither control nor obey their desires, by the dithering of a life that cannot see its way ahead, and by the lethargy of a soul stagnating amid its abandoned hopes. All these afflictions are worse when, through

hatred of their toilsome failure, men have retreated into idleness and private studies which are unbearable to a mind aspiring to public service, keen on activity, and restless by nature because of course it is short of inner resources. In consequence, when the pleasures have been removed which busy people derive from their actual activities, the mind cannot endure the house, the solitude, the walls, and hates to observe its own isolation. From this arises that boredom and self-dissatisfaction, that turmoil of a restless mind and gloomy and grudging endurance of our leisure, especially when we are ashamed to admit the reasons for it and our sense of shame drives the agony inward, and our desires are trapped in narrow bounds without escape and stifle themselves. From this arise melancholy and mourning and a thousand vacillations of a wavering mind, buoyed up by the birth of hope and sickened by the death of it. From this arises the state of mind of those who loathe their own leisure and complain that they have nothing to do, and the bitterest envy at the promotion of others. For unproductive idleness nurtures malice, and because they themselves could not prosper they want everyone else to be ruined. Then from this dislike of others' success and despair of their own, their minds become enraged against fortune, complain about the times, retreat into obscurity, and brood over their own sufferings until they become sick and tired of themselves. For the human mind is naturally mobile and enjoys activity. Every chance of stimulation and distraction is welcome to it – even more welcome to all those inferior characters who actually enjoy being worn out by busy activity. There

are certain bodily sores which welcome the hands that will hurt them, and long to be touched, and a foul itch loves to be scratched: in the same way I would say that those minds on which desires have broken out like horrid sores take delight in toil and aggravation. For some things delight our bodies even when they cause some pain, like turning over to change a side that is not yet tired and repeatedly shifting to keep cool: so Achilles in Homer lay now on his face, now on his back, trying to settle in different positions, and like an invalid could endure nothing for long but used his restlessness as a cure. Hence men travel far and wide, wandering along foreign shores and making trial by land and sea of their restlessness, which always hates what is around it. 'Let's now go to Campania.' Then when they get bored with luxury – 'Let's visit uncultivated areas; let's explore the woodlands of Bruttium and Lucania.' And yet amid the wilds some delight is missing by which their pampered eyes can find relief from the tedious squalor of these unsightly regions. 'Let's go to Tarentum, with its celebrated harbour and mild winters, an area prosperous enough for a large population even in antiquity.' 'Let's now make our way to the city' – too long have their ears missed the din of applause: now they long to enjoy even the sight of human blood. They make one journey after another and change spectacle for spectacle. As Lucretius says, 'Thus each man ever flees himself.' But to what end, if he does not escape himself? He pursues and dogs himself as his own most tedious companion. And so we must realize that our difficulty is not the fault of the places but of ourselves. We are weak in enduring any-

thing, and cannot put up with toil or pleasure or ourselves or anything for long. This weakness has driven some men to their deaths; because by frequently changing their aims they kept falling back on the same things and had left themselves no room for novelty. They began to be sick of life and the world itself, and out of their enervating self-indulgence arose the feeling 'How long must I face the same things?'

You want to know what remedy I can recommend against this boredom. The best course, as Athenodorus says, would be to busy oneself in the practical activity of political involvement and civic duties. For just as some people spend the day in sun-bathing, exercise and the care of their bodies, and for athletes it is of the highest practical importance to spend most of their time cultivating the strength of their limbs, to which alone they have devoted themselves, so for you, who are training your mind for the contests of public life, by far the finest approach is regular practice. For when one intends to make himself useful to his fellow-citizens and fellow-men, he is at the same time getting practice and doing good if he throws himself heart and soul into the duty of looking after both the community and the individual. 'But,' says Athenodorus, 'since mankind is so insanely ambitious and so many false accusers twist right into wrong, making honesty unsafe and bound to meet resistance rather than help, we should indeed retire from public and political life, though a great mind has scope for free activity even in private life. The energies of lions and other animals are restricted by cages, but not of men, whose finest achievements are seen in retirement.

However, let a man seclude himself on condition that, wherever he conceals his leisure, he is prepared to serve both individuals and all mankind by his intellect, his words and his counsel. Service to the state is not restricted to the man who produces candidates for office, defends people in court, and votes for peace and war: the man who teaches the young, who instils virtue into their minds (and we have a great shortage of good teachers), who grips and restrains those who are rushing madly after wealth and luxury, and if nothing more at least delays them – he too is doing a public service, though in private life. Do you imagine that more benefit is provided by the praetors, who settle cases between foreigners and citizens by pronouncing to appellants the verdict of the assessor, than by those who pronounce on the nature of justice, piety, endurance, bravery, contempt of death, knowledge of the gods, and how free a blessing is that of a good conscience? So if you devote to your studies the time you have taken from your public duties you will not have deserted or evaded your task. For the soldier is not only the man who stands in the battle line, defending the right and left wings, but also the one who guards the gates and has the post, less dangerous but not idle, of keeping the watch and guarding the armoury: these duties, though bloodless, count as military service. If you apply yourself to study you will avoid all boredom with life, you will not long for night because you are sick of daylight, you will be neither a burden to yourself nor useless to others, you will attract many to become your friends and the finest people will flock about you. For even obscure virtue is

never concealed but gives visible evidence of herself: anyone worthy of her will follow her tracks. But if we shun all society and, abandoning the human race, live for ourselves alone, this isolation, devoid of any interest, will be followed by a dearth of worthwhile activity. We shall begin to put up some buildings, to pull down others, to push back the sea, to draw waters through unnatural channels, and to squander the time which nature gave us to be used. Some of us use it sparingly, others wastefully; some spend it so that we can give an account of it, others so that we have no balance left – a most shameful result. Often a very old man has no other proof of his long life than his age.'

It seems to me, my dear Serenus, that Athenodorus has too easily submitted to the times and too quickly retreated. I would not deny that one has to yield sometimes – but by a gradual retreat, and holding on to our standards and our soldier's honour. Those who are still armed when they agree terms with their enemies are safer and more highly regarded. This, I think, is what Virtue and Virtue's disciple should do: if Fortune gets the better of someone and deprives him of the means of action, he should not immediately turn his back and bolt, dropping his weapons and looking for a place to hide (as if there were any place where Fortune could not find him), but he should apply himself more sparingly to his duties and choose something carefully in which he can serve the state. Suppose he cannot be a soldier: let him seek public office. Suppose he has to live in a private capacity: let him be an advocate. Suppose he is condemned to silence: let him help his fellow-citizens by

unspoken support. Suppose it is dangerous for him to be seen in the forum: in private homes, at the shows, at banquets let him play the part of a good companion, a loyal friend, a temperate banqueter. Suppose he has lost the duties of a citizen: let him practise those of a man. With a lofty spirit we have refused to confine ourselves within the walls of one city, and we have gone out to have dealings with the whole earth and claimed the world as our country, for this reason, that we might give our virtue a wider field for action. Suppose you are cut off from judicial office, and public speaking and elections are closed to you: consider all the extensive regions that lie open behind you, all the peoples – you will never find an area barred to you so large that an even larger one is not left open. But take care that this is not entirely your fault – for example, that you don't want to take public office except as consul or prytanis or herald or sufes. But suppose you didn't want to serve in the army except as general or tribune? Even if others hold the front line and your lot has put you in the third rank, you must play the soldier there with your voice, your encouragement, your example and your spirit. Even if a man's hands are cut off, he finds he can yet serve his side by standing firm and cheering them on. You should do something like that: if Fortune has removed you from a leading role in public life you should still stand firm and cheer others on, and if someone grips your throat, still stand firm and help though silent. The service of a good citizen is never useless: being heard and seen, he helps by his expression, a nod of his head, a stubborn silence, even his gait. Just as certain wholesome substances do us good by their

odour even without tasting or touching them, so Virtue spreads her advantages even from a distant hiding place. Whether she walks abroad about her legitimate business, or appears on sufferance and is forced to furl her sails, whether she is confined, inactive and dumb, within a narrow space, or fully visible, in any condition at all she does good service. Why do you think that a man living in honourable retirement cannot offer a valuable example? Much the best course, therefore, is to combine leisure with some activity whenever a fully energetic life is impossible owing to the hindrances of chance or the state of the country; for you will never find absolutely every road blocked to some form of honourable activity.

Can you find a more wretched city than Athens when she was being torn apart by the Thirty Tyrants? Having killed thirteen hundred of the best citizens, they did not stop at that, but their very savagery spurred itself on. In a city which contained the Areopagus, a law court of the highest sanctity, and a senate and a popular assembly resembling a senate, there met daily a sinister group of executioners, and the unfortunate senate house was crowded with tyrants. Could that state be at peace where there were as many tyrants as attendants? There could not even be a hope of recovering their liberty nor any obvious chance of retaliation against such powerful villains: for where could the poor country find enough men like Harmodius? Yet Socrates was in the thick of it: he comforted the gloomy city fathers, encouraged those who were despairing of the state, reproached the rich who now feared their own wealth for a tardy repentance of their dangerous greed; and to those willing to imitate

him he was a walking inspiration, as he moved about, a free spirit among thirty masters. Yet this was the man that Athens herself put to death in prison, and Freedom could not bear the freedom of the man who had openly scoffed at a whole troop of tyrants. So you can understand both that in a state suffering disaster the wise man has the opportunity to show an influential presence, and that in a successful and prosperous state money-grubbing, envy and a thousand other unmanly vices reign supreme. Therefore, according to the disposition of the state and the liberty Fortune allows us, we shall either extend or contract our activities; but at all events we shall stir ourselves and not be gripped and paralysed by fear. He indeed will prove a man who, threatened by dangers on all sides, with arms and chains clattering around him, will neither endanger nor conceal his courage: for self-preservation does not entail suppressing onself. Truly, I believe, Curius Dentatus used to say that he preferred real death to living death; for the ultimate horror is to leave the number of the living before you die. But if you happen to live at a time when public life is hard to cope with, you will just have to claim more time for leisure and literary work, seek a safe harbour from time to time as if you were on a dangerous voyage, and not wait for public life to dismiss you but voluntarily release yourself from it first.

However, we must take a careful look first at ourselves, then at the activities which we shall be attempting, and then at those for whose sake and with whom we are attempting them.

Above all it is essential to appraise oneself, because we

usually overestimate our capabilities. One man comes to grief through trusting his eloquence; another makes more demands on his fortune than it can stand; another taxes his frail body with laborious work. Some men are too shy for politics, which require a bold appearance; some through brashness are not fitted for court life; some cannot restrain their anger and any feeling of annoyance drives them to reckless language; some cannot control their wit and refrain from smart but dangerous sallies. For all of these retirement is more expedient than public activity: a passionate and impatient nature must avoid provocations to outspokenness that will cause trouble.

Then we must appraise the actual things we are attempting and match our strength to what we are going to undertake. For the performer must always be stronger than his task: loads that are too heavy for the bearer are bound to overwhelm him. Moreover, certain tasks are not so much great as prolific in producing many other tasks: we must avoid those which give birth in turn to new and manifold activities, and not approach something from which we cannot easily withdraw. You must set your hands to tasks which you can finish or at least hope to finish, and avoid those which get bigger as you proceed and do not cease where you had intended.

We must be especially careful in choosing people, and deciding whether they are worth devoting a part of our lives to them, whether the sacrifice of our time makes a difference to them. For some people actually charge us for our services to them. Athenodorus says he would not even go to dinner with a man who did not thereby

feel indebted to him. I suppose you realize how much less inclined he was to visit those who repay their friends' services with a meal, and count the courses as largesses, as if they were overdoing the honour paid to another. Take away their witnesses and spectators and there is no fun in private gormandizing.

You must consider whether your nature is more suited to practical activity or to quiet study and reflection, and incline in the direction your natural faculty and disposition take you. Isocrates forcibly pulled Ephorus away from the forum, thinking he would be better employed in writing history. Inborn dispositions do not respond well to compulsion, and we labour in vain against nature's opposition.

But nothing delights the mind so much as fond and loyal friendship. What a blessing it is to have hearts that are ready and willing to receive all your secrets in safety, with whom you are less afraid to share knowledge of something than keep it to yourself, whose conversation soothes your distress, whose advice helps you make up your mind, whose cheerfulness dissolves your sorrow, whose very appearance cheers you up! To be sure, we shall choose those who are as far as possible free from strong desires; for vices spread insidiously, and those nearest to hand are assailed and damaged by contact with them. It follows that, just as at a time of an epidemic disease we must take care not to sit beside people whose bodies are infected with feverish disease because we shall risk ourselves and suffer from their breathing upon us, so in choosing our friends for their characters we shall take care to find those who are the least corrupted:

mixing the sound with the sick is how disease starts. But I am not enjoining upon you to follow and associate with none but a wise man. For where will you find him whom we have been seeking for ages? In place of the ideal we must put up with the least bad. You would scarcely have the opportunity of a happier choice if you were hunting for good men among the Platos and Xenophons and all that offspring of the Socratic breed; or if you had access to the age of Cato, which produced many men worthy to be born in Cato's time. (It also produced many who were worse than at any other time and who committed appalling crimes: for both groups were necessary for Cato to be appreciated – he needed the good to win their approval and the bad to prove his strength.) But in the current dearth of good men you must be less particular in your choice. Still, you must especially avoid those who are gloomy and always lamenting, and who grasp at every pretext for complaint. Though a man's loyalty and kindness may not be in doubt, a companion who is agitated and groaning about everything is an enemy to peace of mind.

Let us turn to private possessions, the greatest source of human misery. For if you compare all the other things from which we suffer, deaths, illnesses, fears, desires, endurance of pains and toils, with the evils which money brings us, the latter will far outweigh the others. So we must bear in mind how much lighter is the pain of not having money than of losing it; and we shall realize that the less poverty has to lose the less agony it can cause us. For you are mistaken if you think that rich people suffer with more fortitude: the pain of a wound is the

same in the largest and the smallest bodies. Bion aptly remarks that plucking out hair hurts bald people just as much as those with hair. You can make the same point that rich and poor suffer equal distress: for both groups cling to their money and suffer if it is torn away from them. But, as I said, it is easier to bear and simpler not to acquire than to lose, so you will notice that those people are more cheerful whom Fortune has never favoured than those whom she has deserted. That great-souled man Diogenes realized this, and arranged that nothing could be taken from him. You can call this state poverty, deprivation, need, and give this freedom from care any shameful name you like: I shall not count this man happy if you can find me another who has nothing to lose. If I am not mistaken it is a royal position among all the misers, the cheats, the robbers, the kidnappers, to be the only one who cannot be harmed. If anyone has any doubts about Diogenes' felicity he can also have doubts about the condition of the immortal gods – whether they are living unhappily because they have no estates and parks and costly farms let out to foreign tenants and vast receipts of interest in the forum. Are you not ashamed of yourselves, all of you who are smitten by wealth? Come, look at the heavens: you will see the gods devoid of possessions, and giving everything though they have nothing. Do you think a man who has stripped himself of all the gifts of chance is poor, or that he resembles the immortal gods? Demetrius, Pompey's freedman, was not ashamed to be richer than Pompey: would you say he was thereby happier? He used to keep the tally of his slaves daily like a general reviewing his

army, where previously he would have thought it riches to have two under-slaves and a roomier cell. Yet when Diogenes was told that his only slave had run away, he did not think it worth the trouble to get him back. 'It would be degrading,' he said, 'if Manes can live without Diogenes and not Diogenes without Manes.' I think what he meant was: 'Mind your own business, Fortune: Diogenes has nothing of yours now. My slave has run away – no, it is I who have got away free.' A household of slaves needs clothing and food; so many bellies of ravenous creatures must be looked after, garments bought, thieving hands guarded against, and services employed in the face of tears and curses. How much happier is the man who owes nothing to anybody except the one he can most easily refuse, himself! But since we have not such strength of will, we must at least curtail our possessions, so we may be less exposed to the blows of Fortune. Men's bodies are better fitted for warfare if they can be compressed into their armour than if they bulge out of it and by their very bulk are exposed on every side to wounds. So the ideal amount of money is that which neither falls within the range of poverty nor far exceeds it.

Moreover, we shall be satisfied with this limit if we previously practised thrift, without which no amount of wealth is enough, and no amount is not ample enough; especially as a remedy is to hand and poverty can itself turn to riches by practising economy. Let us get used to banishing ostentation, and to measuring things by their qualities of function rather than display. Let food banish hunger and drink banish thirst; let sex indulge its needs;

let us learn to rely on our limbs, and to adjust our style of dress and our way of living not to the newfangled patterns but to the customs of our ancestors. Let us learn to increase our self-restraint, to curb luxury, to moderate ambition, to soften anger, to regard poverty without prejudice, to practise frugality, even if many are ashamed of it, to apply to nature's needs the remedies that are cheaply available, to curb as if in fetters unbridled hopes and a mind obsessed with the future, and to aim to acquire our riches from ourselves rather than from Fortune. It is not possible that all the manifold and unfair disasters of life can be so repelled that many storm winds will not still assail those who spread their sails ambitiously. We must restrict our activities so that Fortune's weapons miss their mark; and for that reason exiles and calamities have proved to benefit us and greater disasters have been mended by lesser ones. When the mind is less amenable to instruction and cannot be cured by milder means, why should it not be helped by having a dose of poverty and disgrace and general ruin – dealing with evil by evil? So let us get used to dining without a mass of people, to being slave to fewer slaves, to acquiring clothes for their proper purpose, and to living in more restricted quarters. Not only in running and the contests of the Circus, but in this race course of our lives we must keep to the inner track.

Even in our studies, where expenditure is most worth while, its justification depends on its moderation. What is the point of having countless books and libraries whose titles the owner could scarcely read through in his whole lifetime? The mass of books burdens the student without

instructing him, and it is far better to devote yourself to a few authors than to get lost among many. Forty thousand books were burned in the library at Alexandria. Someone else can praise it as a sumptuous monument to royal wealth, like Titus Livius, who calls it a notable achievement of the good taste and devotion of kings. That was not good taste or devotion but scholarly self-indulgence – in fact, not even scholarly, since they had collected the books not for scholarship but for display. In the same way you will find that many people who lack even elementary culture keep books not as tools of learning but as decoration for their dining-rooms. So we should buy enough books for use, and none just for embellishment. 'But this,' you say, 'is a more honourable expense than squandering money on Corinthian bronzes and on pictures.' But excess in any sphere is reprehensible. How can you excuse a man who collects bookcases of citron-wood and ivory, amasses the works of unknown or third-rate authors, and then sits yawning among all his thousands of books and gets most enjoyment out of the appearance of his volumes and their labels? Thus you will see that the idlest men possess sets of orations and histories, with crates piled up to the ceiling: for nowadays an elegant library too has joined hot and cold baths as an essential adornment for a house. I would certainly excuse people for erring through an excessive love of study; but these collections of works of inspired genius, along with their several portraits, are acquired only for pretentious wall decoration.

But perhaps you have become involved in some difficult situation in life in which either public or private

circumstances have fastened a noose on you unawares, which you can neither loosen nor snap. You must reflect that fettered prisoners only at first feel the weight of the shackles on their legs: in time, when they have decided not to struggle against but to bear them, they learn from necessity to endure with fortitude, and from habit to endure with ease. In any situation in life you will find delights and relaxations and pleasures if you are prepared to make light of your troubles and not let them distress you. In no respect has nature put us more in her debt, since, knowing to what sorrows we were born, she contrived habit to soothe our disasters, and so quickly makes us grow used to the worst ills. No one could endure lasting adversity if it continued to have the same force as when it first hit us. We are all tied to Fortune, some by a loose and golden chain, and others by a tight one of baser metal: but what does it matter? We are all held in the same captivity, and those who have bound others are themselves in bonds – unless you think perhaps that the left-hand chain is lighter. One man is bound by high office, another by wealth; good birth weighs down some, and a humble origin others; some bow under the rule of other men and some under their own; some are restricted to one place by exile, others by priesthoods: all life is a servitude. So you have to get used to your circumstances, complain about them as little as possible, and grasp whatever advantage they have to offer: no condition is so bitter that a stable mind cannot find some consolation in it. Often small areas can be skilfully divided up to allow room for many uses and arrangement can make a narrow piece of ground

inhabitable. Think your way through difficulties: harsh conditions can be softened, restricted ones can be widened, and heavy ones can weigh less on those who know how to bear them. Moreover, we must not send our desires on a distant hunt, but allow them to explore what is near to hand, since they do not submit to being totally confined. Abandoning those things which are impossible or difficult to attain, let us pursue what is readily available and entices our hopes, yet recognize that all are equally trivial, outwardly varied in appearance but uniformly futile within. And let us not envy those who stand higher than we do: what look like towering heights are precipices. On the other hand, those whom an unfair fate has put in a critical condition will be safer for lowering their pride in things that are in themselves proud and reducing their fortune as far as they can to a humble level. Indeed there are many who are forced to cling to their pinnacle because they cannot descend without falling; but they must bear witness that this in itself is their greatest burden, that they are forced to be a burden to others, and that they are not so much elevated as impaled. By justice, gentleness, kindness and lavish generosity let them prepare many defences against later disasters to give them hope of hanging on more safely. But nothing can rescue us from these mental vacillations so efficiently as always to set some limit to advancements, and not to allow Fortune the decision when they should cease but ourselves to stop far short of that. In this way we shall have some desires to stimulate the mind, but being limited they will not lead us to a state of uncontrolled uncertainty.

What I am saying applies to people who are imperfect, commonplace and unsound, not to the wise man. He does not have to walk nervously or cautiously, for he has such self-confidence that he does not hesitate to make a stand against Fortune and will never give ground to her. He has no reason to fear her, since he regards as held on sufferance not only his goods and possessions and status, but even his body, his eyes and hand, and all that makes life more dear, and his very self; and he lives as though he were lent to himself and bound to return the loan on demand without complaint. Nor is he thereby cheap in his own eyes because he knows he is not his own, but he will act in all things as carefully and meticulously as a devout and holy man guards anything entrusted to him. And whenever he is ordered to repay his debt he will not complain to Fortune, but he will say: 'I thank you for what I have possessed and held. I have looked after your property to my great benefit, but at your command I give and yield it with gratitude and good will. If you want me still to have anything of yours, I shall keep it safe; if you wish otherwise, I give back and restore to you my silver, both coined and plate, my house and my household.' Should Nature demand back what she previously entrusted to us we shall say to her too: 'Take back my spirit in better shape than when you gave it. I do not quibble or hang back: I am willing for you to have straightway what you gave me before I was conscious – take it.' What is the harm in returning to the point whence you came? He will live badly who does not know how to die well. So we must first strip off the value we set on this thing and reckon the breath of life

as something cheap. To quote Cicero, we hate gladiators if they are keen to save their life by any means; we favour them if they openly show contempt for it. You must realize that the same thing applies to us: for often the cause of dying is the fear of it. Dame Fortune, who makes sport with us, says, 'Why should I preserve you, base and fearful creature? You will only receive more severe wounds and stabs, as you don't know how to offer your throat. But you will both live longer and die more easily, since you receive the blade bravely, without withdrawing your neck and putting your hands in the way. He who fears death will never do anything worthy of a living man. But he who knows that this was the condition laid down for him at the moment of his conception will live on those terms, and at the same time he will guarantee with a similar strength of mind that no events take him by surprise. For by foreseeing anything that can happen as though it will happen he will soften the onslaught of all his troubles, which present no surprises to those who are ready and waiting for them, but fall heavily on those who are careless in the expectation that all will be well. There is disease, imprisonment, disaster, fire: none of these is unexpected – I did know in what riotous company Nature had enclosed me. So many times have the dead been lamented in my neighbourhood; so many times have torch and taper conducted untimely funerals past my threshold. Often has the crash of a falling building echoed beside me. Many who were linked to me through the forum and the senate and everyday conversation have been carried off in a night, which has severed the hands once joined in friendship.

Should it surprise me if the perils which have always roamed around me should some day reach me? A great number of people plan a sea voyage with no thought of a storm. I shall never be ashamed to go to a bad author for a good quotation. Whenever Publilius abandoned the absurdities of the mime and language aimed at the gallery, he showed more force of intellect than the writers of tragedy and comedy; and he produced many thoughts more striking than those of tragedy, let alone farce, including this one: 'What can happen to one can happen to all.' If you let this idea sink into your vitals, and regard all the ills of other people (of which every day shows an enormous supply) as having a clear path to you too, you will be armed long before you are attacked. It is too late for the mind to equip itself to endure dangers once they are already there. 'I didn't think it would happen' and 'Would you ever have believed it would turn out so?' Why ever not? Are there any riches which are not pursued by poverty and hunger and beggary? What rank is there whose purple robe and augur's staff and patrician shoe-straps are not attended by squalor and the brand of disgrace and a thousand marks of shame and utter contempt? What kingship does not face ruin and trampling down, the tyrant and the hangman? And these things are not separated by wide intervals: there is only a brief hour between sitting on a throne and kneeling to another. Know, then, that every condition can change, and whatever happens to anyone can happen to you too. You are rich: but are you richer than Pompey? Yet even he lacked bread and water when Gaius, his old relation and new host, had opened the

house of Caesar to him so that he could close his own. Though he possessed so many rivers flowing from source to mouth in his own lands, he had to beg for drops of water. He died of hunger and thirst in a kinsman's palace, and while he starved his heir was organizing a state funeral for him. You have filled the highest offices: were they as high or unexpected or all-embracing as Sejanus had? Yet on the same day the senate escorted him to prison and the people tore him to pieces; and there was nothing left for the executioner to drag away of the man who had had everything heaped on him that gods and men could offer. You are a king: I shall not direct you to Croesus, who lived to see his own funeral pyre both lit and extinguished, thus surviving not only his kingdom but his own death; nor to Jugurtha, who was put on show to the Roman people within a year of causing them terror. We have seen Ptolemy, king of Africa, and Mithridates, king of Armenia, imprisoned by Gaius. One of them was sent into exile; the other hoped to be sent there in better faith. In all this topsy-turvy succession of events, unless you regard anything that can happen as bound to happen you give adversity a power over you which the man who sees it first can crush.

The next thing to ensure is that we do not waste our energies pointlessly or in pointless activities: that is, not to long either for what we cannot achieve, or for what, once gained, only makes us realize too late and after much exertion the futility of our desires. In other words, let our labour not be in vain and without result, nor the result unworthy of our labour; for usually bitterness follows if either we do not succeed or we are ashamed

of succeeding. We must cut down on all this dashing about that a great many people indulge in, as they throng around houses and theatres and fora: they intrude into other people's affairs, always giving the impression of being busy. If you ask one of them as he comes out of a house, 'Where are you going? What do you have in mind?' he will reply, 'I really don't know; but I'll see some people, I'll do something.' They wander around aimlessly looking for employment, and they do not what they intended but what they happen to run across. Their roaming is idle and pointless, like ants crawling over bushes, which purposelessly make their way right up to the topmost branch and then all the way down again. Many people live a life like these creatures, and you could not unjustly call it busy idleness. You will feel sorry for some folk you see rushing along as if to a fire; so often do they bump headlong into those in their way and send themselves and others sprawling, when all the time they have been running to call on someone who will not return the call, or to attend the funeral of somebody they don't know, or the trial of somebody who is constantly involved in litigation, or the betrothal of a woman who is constantly getting married, and while attending a litter have on occasion even carried it. They then return home, worn out to no purpose and swearing they themselves don't know why they went out or where they have been – and the next day they will wander forth on the same old round. So let all your activity be directed to some object, let it have some end in view. It is not industry that makes men restless, but false impressions of things drive them mad. For even madmen need some

hope to stir them: the outward show of some object excites them because their deluded mind cannot detect its worthlessness. In the same way every individual among those who wander forth to swell a crowd is led round the city by empty and trivial reasons. Dawn drives him forth with nothing to do, and after he has been jostled in vain on many men's doorsteps and only succeeds in greeting their slave-announcers, shut out by many he finds no one at home with more difficulty than himself. This evil leads in turn to that most disgraceful vice of eavesdropping and prying into public and secret things and learning about many matters which are safe neither to talk about nor to listen to.

I imagine that Democritus had this in mind when he began: 'Anyone who wishes to live a quiet life should not engage in many activities either privately or publicly' – meaning, of course, useless ones. For if they are essential, then not just many but countless things have to be done both privately and publicly. But when no binding duty summons us we must restrain our actions. For a man who is occupied with many things often puts himself into the power of Fortune, whereas the safest policy is rarely to tempt her, though to keep her always in mind and to trust her in nothing. Thus: 'I shall sail unless something happens'; and 'I shall become praetor unless something prevents me'; and 'My business will be successful unless something interferes.' That is why we say that nothing happens to the wise man against his expectation. We remove him not from the chances that befall mankind but from their mistakes, nor do all things turn out for him as he wished but as he reckoned – and

above all he reckoned that something could block his plans. But inevitably the mind can cope more easily with the distress arising from disappointed longings if you have not promised it certain success.

We should also make ourselves flexible, so that we do not pin our hopes too much on our set plans, and can move over to those things to which chance has brought us, without dreading a change in either our purpose or our condition, provided that fickleness, that fault most inimical to tranquillity, does not get hold of us. For obstinacy, from which Fortune often extorts something, is bound to bring wretchedness and anxiety, and much more serious is the fickleness that nowhere restrains itself. Both are hostile to tranquillity, and find change impossible and endurance impossible. In any case the mind must be recalled from external objects into itself: it must trust in itself, rejoice in itself, admire its own things; it must withdraw as much as possible from the affairs of others and devote its attention to itself; it must not feel losses and should take a kindly view even of misfortunes. When a shipwreck was reported and he heard that all his possessions had sunk, our founder Zeno said, 'Fortune bids me be a less encumbered philosopher.' When a tyrant threatened to kill the philosopher Theodorus, and indeed to leave him unburied, he replied, 'You can please yourself, and my half-pint of blood is in your power; but as to burial, you are a fool if you think it matters to me whether I rot above or below ground.' Julius Canus, an outstandingly fine man, whom we can admire even though he was born in our age, had a long dispute with Gaius; and as he was going away

that Phalaris said to him, 'In case you are deluding yourself with foolish hopes, I have ordered you to be led off to execution.' His reply was 'I thank you, noble emperor.' I am not certain what he meant, for many possibilities occur to me. Did he mean to be insulting by showing the extent of the cruelty which caused death to be a blessing? Was he taunting him with his daily bouts of madness (for people used to thank him whose children had been murdered and whose property had been confiscated)? Was he accepting his sentence as a welcome release? Whatever he meant, it was a spirited reply. Someone will say, 'After this Gaius could have ordered him to live.' Canus was not afraid of that: Gaius was known to keep his word in commands of that sort. Will you believe that Canus spent the ten days leading up to his execution without any anxiety at all? It is incredible what that man said, what he did, how calm he remained. He was playing draughts when the centurion who was dragging off a troop of condemned men ordered him to be summoned too. At the call he counted his pieces and said to his companion, 'See that you don't falsely claim after my death that you won.' Then, nodding to the centurion, he said, 'You will be witness that I am leading by one piece.' Do you think Canus was just enjoying his game at that board? He was enjoying his irony. His friends were sorrowful at the prospect of losing such a man, and he said to them, 'Why are you sad? You are wondering whether souls are immortal: I shall soon know.' He did not cease searching for the truth right up to the end and making his own death a topic for discussion. His philosophy teacher went with him, and

when they were not far from the mound on which our god Caesar received his daily offering, he said, 'Canus, what are you thinking about now? What is your state of mind?' Canus replied, 'I have decided to take note whether in that most fleeting moment the spirit is aware of its departure from the body'; and he promised that if he discovered anything he would visit his friends in turn and reveal to them the state of the soul. Just look at that serenity in the midst of a hurricane, that spirit worthy of immortality, which invokes its own fate to establish the truth, and in that very last phase of life questions the departing soul and seeks to learn something not only up to the time of death but from the very experience of death itself. No one ever pursued philosophy longer. So great a man will not quickly be relinquished, and he should be referred to with respect: glorious spirit, who swelled the roll of Gaius' victims, we shall ensure your immortality.

But there is no point in banishing the causes of private sorrow, for sometimes we are gripped by a hatred of the human race. When you consider how rare is simplicity and how unknown is innocence, how you scarcely ever find loyalty except when it is expedient, what a host of successful crimes you come across, and all the things equally hateful that men gain and lose through lust, and how ambition is now so far from setting limits to itself that it acquires a lustre from viciousness – all this drives the mind into a darkness whose shadows overwhelm it, as though those virtues were overturned which it is not possible to hope for and not useful to possess. We must therefore school ourselves to regard all commonly held

vices as not hateful but ridiculous, and we should imitate Democritus rather than Heraclitus. For whenever these went out in public, the latter used to weep and the former to laugh; the latter thought all our activities sorrows, the former, follies. So we should make light of all things and endure them with tolerance: it is more civilized to make fun of life than to bewail it. Bear in mind too that he deserves better of the human race as well who laughs at it than he who grieves over it; since the one allows it a fair prospect of hope, while the other stupidly laments over things he cannot hope will be put right. And, all things considered, it is the mark of a greater mind not to restrain laughter than not to restrain tears, since laughter expresses the gentlest of our feelings, and reckons that nothing is great or serious or even wretched in all the trappings of our existence. Let every man contemplate the individual occurrences which bring us joy or grief, and he will learn the truth of Bion's dictum, that all the activities of men are like their beginnings, and their life is not more high-souled or serious than their conception, and that being born from nothing they are reduced to nothing. Yet it is preferable to accept calmly public behaviour and human failings, and not to collapse into either laughter or tears. For to be tormented by other people's troubles means perpetual misery, while to take delight in them is an inhuman pleasure; just as it is an empty show of kindness to weep and assume a solemn look because somebody is burying a son. In your own troubles too, the appropriate conduct is to indulge as much grief as nature, not custom, demands: for many people weep in order to be seen weeping, though their

eyes are dry as long as there is nobody looking, since they regard it as bad form not to weep when everyone is weeping. This evil of taking our cue from others has become so deeply ingrained that even that most basic feeling, grief, degenerates into imitation.

We must next look at a category of occurrences which with good reason cause us grief and anxiety. When good men come to a bad end, when Socrates is compelled to die in prison and Rutilius to live in exile, when Pompey and Cicero have to offer their necks to their clients, when Cato, that living pattern of the virtues, has to fall on his sword to show the world what is happening to himself and the state at the same time; then we have to feel anguish that Fortune hands out such unfair rewards. And what can each of us then hope for himself when he sees the best men suffering the worst fates? What follows then? Observe how each of those men bore his fate; and if they were brave, long with your spirit for a spirit like theirs; if they died with womanly cowardice, then nothing died with them. Either they are worthy of your admiration for their courage or unworthy of your longing for their cowardice. For what is more disgraceful than if supremely great men by dying bravely make others fearful? Let us repeatedly praise one who deserves praise and let us say: 'The braver one is, the happier he is! You have escaped all mischances, envy and disease; you have come forth from prison – not that you seemed to the gods worthy of ill fortune, but unworthy that Fortune should any longer have power over you.' But we have to lay hands on those who pull back and at the very point of death look back towards life. I shall weep

for no one who is happy and for no one who is weeping: the one has himself wiped away my tears; the other by his own tears has proved himself unworthy of any. Should I weep for Hercules because he was burned alive, or Regulus because he was pierced by all those nails, or Cato because he wounded his own wounds? All of them by giving up a brief spell of time found the way to become eternal, and by dying achieved immortality.

There is also another not inconsiderable source of anxieties, if you are too concerned to assume a pose and do not reveal yourself openly to anyone, like many people whose lives are false and aimed only at outward show. For it is agonizing always to be watching yourself in fear of being caught when your usual mask has slipped. Nor can we ever be carefree when we think that whenever we are observed we are appraised; for many things happen to strip us of our pretensions against our will, and even if all this attention to oneself succeeds, yet the life of those who always live behind a mask is not pleasant or free from care. On the contrary, how full of pleasure is that honest and naturally unadorned simplicity that in no way hides its disposition! Yet this life too runs a risk of being scorned if everything is revealed to everybody; for with some people familiarity breeds contempt. But there is no danger of virtue being held cheap as a result of close observation, and it is better to be despised for simplicity than to suffer agonies from everlasting pretence. Still, let us use moderation here: there is a big difference between living simply and living carelessly.

We should also withdraw a lot into ourselves; for associating with people unlike ourselves upsets a calm

disposition, stirs up passions again, and aggravates any mental weakness which has not been completely cured. However, the two things must be mingled and varied, solitude and joining a crowd: the one will make us long for people and the other for ourselves, and each will be a remedy for the other; solitude will cure our distaste for a crowd, and a crowd will cure our boredom with solitude.

The mind should not be kept continuously at the same pitch of concentration, but given amusing diversions. Socrates did not blush to play with small children; Cato soothed his mind with wine when it was tired from the cares of state; and Scipio used to disport that triumphal and military form in the dance, not shuffling about delicately in the present style, when even in walking men mince and wriggle with more than effeminate voluptuousness, but in the old-fashioned, manly style in which men danced at times of games and festivals, without loss of dignity even if their enemies were watching them. Our minds must relax: they will rise better and keener after a rest. Just as you must not force fertile farmland, as uninterrupted productivity will soon exhaust it, so constant effort will sap our mental vigour, while a short period of rest and relaxation will restore our powers. Unremitting effort leads to a kind of mental dullness and lethargy. Nor would men's wishes move so much in this direction if sport and play did not involve a sort of natural pleasure; though repeated indulgence in these will destroy all the gravity and force of our minds. After all, sleep too is essential as a restorative, but if you prolong it constantly day and night it will be

death. There is a big difference between slackening your hold on something and severing the link. Law-givers established holidays to give people a public mandate to enjoy themselves, thinking it necessary to introduce a sort of balance into their labours; and, as I said, certain great men gave themselves monthly holidays on fixed days, while others divided every day into periods of leisure and work. I remember that this was the practice of the great orator Asinius Pollio, whom nothing kept at work after the tenth hour. After that time he would not even read his letters, in case something fresh cropped up to be dealt with; but in those two hours he would rid himself of the weariness of the whole day. Some take a break in the middle of the day and keep any less demanding task for the afternoon hours. Our ancestors also forbad any new motion to be introduced in the senate after the tenth hour. The army divides the watches, and those who are returning from an expedition are exempt from night duty. We must indulge the mind and from time to time allow it the leisure which is its food and strength. We must go for walks out of doors, so that the mind can be strengthened and invigorated by a clear sky and plenty of fresh air. At times it will acquire fresh energy from a journey by carriage and a change of scene, or from socializing and drinking freely. Occasionally we should even come to the point of intoxication, sinking into drink but not being totally flooded by it; for it does wash away cares, and stirs the mind to its depths, and heals sorrow just as it heals certain diseases. Liber was not named because he loosens the tongue, but because he liberates the mind from its slavery to cares,

emancipates it, invigorates it, and emboldens it for all its undertakings. But there is a healthy moderation in wine, as in liberty. Solon and Arcesilas are thought to have liked their wine, and Cato has been accused of drunkenness; whoever accused him will more easily make the charge honourable than Cato disgraceful. But we must not do this often, in case the mind acquires a bad habit; yet at times it must be stimulated to rejoice without restraint and austere soberness must be banished for a while. For whether we agree with the Greek poet that 'Sometimes it is sweet to be mad,' or with Plato that 'A man sound in mind knocks in vain at the doors of poetry,' or with Aristotle that 'No great intellect has been without a touch of madness,' only a mind that is deeply stirred can utter something noble and beyond the power of others. When it has scorned everyday and commonplace thoughts and risen aloft on the wings of divine inspiration, only then does it sound a note nobler than mortal voice could utter. As long as it remains in its senses it cannot reach any lofty and difficult height: it must desert the usual track and race away, champing the bit and hurrying its driver in its course to a height it would have feared to scale by itself.

So here you have, my dear Serenus, the means of preserving your tranquillity, the means of restoring it, and the means of resisting the faults that creep up on you unawares. But be sure of this, that none of them is strong enough for those who want to preserve such a fragile thing, unless the wavering mind is surrounded by attentive and unceasing care.

伟大的思想
Great Ideas from Penguin

纵观历史，有的书改变了世界。它们扭转了我们看待自身和他人的方式。它们引发争论，产生异见，挑起战争，催化革命。它们发人深省，激发愤懑，鼓动情绪，提供慰藉。它们丰富了我们的生活，也摧毁了我们的生活。现在，《伟大的思想》丛书带您领略伟大的思想家、先驱、激进分子和梦想家的著作，他们的思想撼动了旧有的文明，塑造了我们现在的样子。

1	亨利·戴维·梭罗	我的栖身之所，我的人生目的
2	拉尔夫·瓦尔多·爱默生	论自然
3	弗里德里希·尼采	天才，舍我其谁?
4	亚当·斯密	看不见的手
5	塞内加	论生命之短暂
6	阿图尔·叔本华	论世间苦难
7	托马斯·潘恩	常识
8	弗朗西斯·培根	论君权
9	让-雅克·卢梭	社会契约论
10	奥古斯丁	忏悔录
11	米歇尔·德·蒙田	论友谊
12	列夫· 托尔斯泰	忏悔录
13	弗里德里希·尼采	与孤独为伍
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